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PROBLEMS OF THE COUNTRYSIDE

BY

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How shall he become wise that holdeth the plough,
That glorieth in the shaft of the goad,
That driveth oxen, and is occupied in their labours,
And whose discourse is of the stock of bulls?
He will set his heart upon turning his furrows;
And his wakefulness is to give his heifers their fodder.

So is the smith sitting by the anvil,
And considering the unwrought iron:
The vapour of the fire will waste his flesh;
And in the heat of the furnace will he wrestle with his work:
The noise of the hammer will be ever in his ear,
And his eyes are upon the pattern of the vessel;
He will set his heart upon perfecting his works,
And he will be wakeful to adorn them perfectly.

So is the potter sitting at his work,
And turning the wheel about with his feet,
Who is alway anxiously set at his work,
And all his handywork is by number;
He will fashion the clay with his arm,
And will bend its strength in front of his feet;
He will apply his heart to finish the glazing;
And he will be wakeful to make clean the furnace.

All these put their trust in their hands;
And each becometh wise in his own work.
Without these shall not a city be inhabited,
And men shall not sojourn nor walk up and down therein.
They shall not be sought for in the council of the people,
And in the assembly they shall not mount on high;
They shall not sit on the seat of the judge,
And they shall not understand the covenant of judgement:
Neither shall they declare instruction and judgement;
And where parables are they shall not be found.

But they will maintain the fabric of the world;
And in the handywork of their craft is their prayer.

Ecclesiasticus, xxxviii, 25, 26, 28-34

CHAPTER I

THE BACKGROUND

Washington Irving's creation, the farmer Rip Van Winkle, who fell asleep for twenty years, was astonished at the changes which he saw about him on his awakening. That was in eighteenth-century America. Supposing a latter-day Rip Van Winkle had fallen asleep about the year 1880, somewhere in rural England—in Devon, say, or in the Cotswolds, in mid-Wales, in the Yorkshire Dales, or in Norfolk—and had slept, not for twenty but for sixty years, what unfamiliar sights would have greeted him when he awoke?

In the landscape before him, he would have seen nothing to excite his wonder, little, even, to cause comment. The fields, most of them small and irregularly fenced with hedgerows or stone walls, would be familiar enough, though he might think that they displayed more grass and less ploughland than in his youth. The farm-houses and buildings scattered amongst the fields would appear, perhaps, a little shabbier, a little more dilapidated than the standards of estate management in the Golden Age of his boyhood would have tolerated; here and there a corrugated-iron roof might raise a question. Otherwise, he would find nothing new or strange in them. The lanes leading to and from the village would

pursue the same devious courses between the same grass verges, just as he had known them so well.

When he walked into his village, once more the modern Rip Van Winkle would feel at home. The passage of two generations had made no changes in the church, which stood as it had these 500 years, nor in the school and schoolhouse built in the 1830's outside the churchyard wall, nor in the mid-Victorian vicarage across the road. One or two of the oldest cottages might have gone, but he would hardly notice that; most of them stood as he remembered them, their roofs of thatch or stone projecting over small casement windows, front doors opening direct into low-ceiled living-rooms, the gardens bright with the same cottage flowers. Rarely, he might see and wonder at the electric cables stringing from house to house, but this would be only if his village were exceptional. The public-houses, with their familiar signs, would welcome him as of old; the village shop and Post Office still on the same spot, and the Methodist chapel, built when he was a boy. Here and there on the outskirts, one or two pairs of cottages might appear which he had not known, but there would be nothing surprising in that; he recalled the erection, in his day, of that red brick villa beside the village green, and he noted a mellowing of its asperities.

He hardly observed the woman walking, bucket in hand, to the parish pump, or the one emerging from her back door to fling a pail of slops on the garden. These things had always been so. He may

have wondered what had become of the windmill on the hill, or why the waterwheel on the stream was silent; why the blacksmith's shop was shuttered this working afternoon, and the wheelwright's yard full of nettles and his workshops decayed. Taking one thing with another, however, our Rip Van Winkle would feel quite at home with his surroundings, after his long sleep. In fact, almost the only things to surprise him would be the motor vehicles of all kinds on the roads, and the tractors on the land.

But if he should revisit the nearby market town which he had known well enough, would he find himself equally at home in a once familiar scene? On the contrary, he might go about it as a complete stranger. His village had been static, or nearly so, it had neither grown nor changed. Here, however, there had been great developments. The main street appeared to have been rebuilt; the little shop fronts and the traders' names that he had known had given place to great plate-glass window displays by unfamiliar firms. The horse trams and nearly all horse traffic had disappeared, and omnibuses and vehicles of many kinds moved down the road without visible means of propulsion. He would note, with more satisfaction, that most of the dark and narrow courts which he remembered swarming with dirty children, behind the main street, had disappeared. He would lose his way amongst new factories, new shopping districts and, above all, in a great growth on the outskirts of regimented industrial dwellings. Inside these houses he would find equipment of a standard

associated in his mind only with the squire's house of his village, and in some particulars it might be better even than that: water at the turning of a tap; light flooding the rooms on touching a switch; baths, internal sanitation, and public collection of refuse. There would be a parlour as well as a kitchen in every house, and bedrooms enough to accommodate a family without overcrowding.

In the streets, Van Winkle would notice the high proportion of young people of both sexes hurrying to and from their work. One thing that had struck him in his village and about the neighbouring fields had been the dearth of young adults. Here, he would see them in the evening flocking into places of amusement, and on Saturdays going in their hundreds to football or cricket matches, or to the dog-racing stadium. Closer acquaintance would disclose the opportunities provided for every kind of educational, cultural, recreational and social life. He would remember few, if any, of such opportunities and facilities in the town as he had known it, and while he wondered at them he could not fail to wonder, also, why his own village had not developed similarly in any of these directions. Here, surely, was something which called for investigation.

This is the problem which confronts everyone who is concerned for the future of the English countryside—how to secure for the countryman the economic opportunities and social amenities which the townsman enjoys, without destroying, at the same time, all

the advantages which should accrue from a rural setting for life and labour. The land is the source of life alike for townsmen and countrymen, and Nature has thrown down a challenge to man to discover her secrets if he can, and to learn how to direct the uncontrolled profusion of her gifts into his service. Thus, settlement and cultivation came to supersede the nomadic life, and progress continued, through the days of small, self-sufficient communities, until the time when the steady acquisition and application of knowledge had made it possible to develop commercial food production. As increasing surpluses became available for barter or for sale, a rising standard of living was introduced and town and country were developed as complementary members of one society, the country furnishing food and raw materials for the town, and the town returning goods and services to the country.

In theory, at all events, this should have been the basis of a satisfactory social organization. The wealth of the community came from the soil, and as knowledge about it advanced and efficiency in handling it increased, countryman and townsman alike should have been enriched. In practice, however, what do we find? With a few exceptions, the economic and social life of the countryman, to-day, judged by almost any standard, will not bear comparison with that of the industrial worker living in the town.

For many years, farmers as a whole have been unable to produce anything from the land without State assistance in one form or another. Farming

equipment is not only obsolete, much of it, for the purposes of modern husbandry, but too often it is also dilapidated and ill-found. The very farms and fields have been laid out for the technical organization of a hundred years ago, when manual and horse labour were the only forms of power, and too often they impose the maximum of inconvenience in the use of modern machinery. The wages of farm workers are lower than those of any other form of skilled labour in the country. Nearly all of the old village industries and local crafts have gone, and the country-bred boy must choose, nowadays, between work on the land in a somewhat backward industry, or migration from his village.

The standard of rural housing is deplorably low, both in planning and in accommodation. The services of the house, such as water supply, electricity, gas, and sewerage, are wanting altogether, or else only partially available and often inadequate. Further, the country housewife is handicapped, too often, by the remoteness of her home from the village and by the limited shopping facilities which the smaller villages can offer.

In spiritual, educational and social matters, too, the countryman again may be at a disadvantage. In the towns, public worship is congregational; in the country, it is parochial. Too many of the clergy of the Established Church are wasting their lives in what are only part-time jobs, while struggling, at the same time, to support existence on what are, in effect, no more than part-time stipends; few of the villages are

large enough to offer scope to the Free Churches for anything more than a hurried visit on Sundays from a peripatetic preacher. Education is given in buildings erected in conformity with the standards, perhaps, of a hundred years ago. In the smaller places there may be no school at all, the children being sent to neighbouring villages, or, perhaps worse still, one devoted teacher may be found striving to instruct children of all ages in one room. Adult and technical education are available only very rarely. Similarly, social institutions are inadequate. In small communities, the leadership and initiative often are lacking, and, not infrequently, the villages are too small in themselves to provide enough people in the various age classes for membership of the clubs and for the other activities which a larger community can support.

All these disabilities of life in the rural areas are being accentuated, in many places, by a steadily declining population. The reduction of arable farming after the 1870's reduced, also, the demand for labour, and the fall in the numbers of agricultural workers has received a fresh impetus in more recent times through the increasing use of machinery and labour-saving devices of all kinds, alike on the land, in the cowshed and in the barn. The Census figures show that it is the agricultural workers, and the younger ones of them, who are leaving the land. Between 1871 and 1931, the number of farmers has remained fairly constant at about a quarter of a million, but the number of farm workers has fallen from nearly a million to just over 500,000, a drop of about 48 per

cent. Even in the time of acute industrial unemployment in the towns, in the years before the war, there was no slackening in the exodus from the land, the loss of men between 1921 and the outbreak of war having been about 10,000 a year. Ever since the beginning of the great agricultural depression some two generations ago, men have been leaving the land to go into other occupations, and they do not come back. 'I'm downright ashamed of you for such a low-down idea. You're going to get on in the world, if I have any say in it, and leave working on the land to them as can't do better for themselves.'* Thus a country mother in the eighties of last century to her little boy who had just told her that he wanted to go to work on the land, and this attitude towards agricultural employment is common enough in country parents to-day.

Although the numbers of occupiers of land have not declined, farmers are far from being a contented race. They have experienced two acute depressions in the last two generations, and for the past fifteen years they have been able to carry on only with the help of heavy State assistance. Organization for war production has introduced many changes, and while the attitude of the older men seems still to be 'Protect us from what we regard as unfair competition, guarantee our markets and prices, but leave us to farm as we like', many of the younger farmers display a keenness and a response to new ideas

* Flora Thompson, *Over to Candleford*, p. 206. Oxford University Press. 1941.

which is a better augury for the changes which are inevitable if farming is ever to hold its own, in peace-time, amongst the greater of our national industries.

However, there have always been people living in the country who are neither farmers nor farm workers, though in many places their numbers, too, have declined. A hundred years ago, and less, almost every village had its blacksmith and its miller, and most of them had other tradesmen and craftsmen besides—wheelwrights and saddlers; tanners, ropers and maltsters; tailors and shoemakers. In districts, too, in which the necessary raw materials were available, lime-burners, brick-makers, hurdle-makers, turners, coopers, and the converters of coppice woods for all sorts of purposes, flourished. To-day, nearly all of these have gone, local production having been displaced by large-scale centralized manufacture or by substitution of other materials. Here and there a local industry has survived, but the industrial element which some villages include comprises factory workers, as a rule, unable to find housing in the nearby factory towns, or those preferring country homes. The handful of shopkeepers, innkeepers, police, postmen, jobbing builders, etc., who made up the rest of village society, still remain, but the disappearance of the craftsmen, tradesmen and little manufacturers who worked in the village itself has destroyed its character and has upset the balance of rural society. The influx in some places of industrial workers, who use the villages as dormitories while

they work elsewhere, has done little, in its present uncontrolled form, to restore this balance.

There remains one other element in the rural population, small in numbers and also declining, to which a passing reference has been made already, the members of the professional and leisured classes. The professional classes are represented by the clergy of all denominations, the doctors, and the school teachers, and the positions and distribution of these are further evidence of the disintegration of the old village society. The old organization of the Church, which put a parson in every parish, has broken down through shortage of clergy, inadequate stipends, and the realization that the cure of two or three hundred souls, and here and there even of fewer, is not a full-time job. The various expedients adopted by the Church to meet this situation have led to an increasing number of small places which are served no longer by resident parsons—with all that this entails in loss of leadership and social life.

Similarly, the setting up of senior schools at local centres and the removal of children from the smaller villages to them at the age of 11, has left the instruction of the juniors to schoolmistresses, some of whom are non-resident; and the village schoolmaster, so often a natural leader and a man of enterprise and authority, has disappeared.

As to the people of leisure, the influence exerted by the landowner has changed very much since the nineteenth century. Great acquisitions of land by the State for national purposes, by the County

Councils for land settlement, by the Forestry Commission for planting, by corporate bodies of several kinds for investment, and by farmers buying for occupation on the break-up of private estates, have profoundly affected the distribution of ownership. Exact figures are not available, but whereas it was estimated that at least 90 per cent of the agricultural land of England was in the hands of private landowners at the beginning of this century, it may be doubted whether this proportion is much more than 50 per cent to-day. Thus, in very many places the resident landowner has gone, the big house has been diverted to other uses, or even pulled down, while elsewhere the unquestioned position of the owner of broad acres and his influence in village life are breaking down. It seems likely that the great country houses will be as obsolete, before long, for the purposes for which they were built, as the medieval castles which many of them had superseded.

Not everywhere, however, has the old order of the country population suffered an unmitigated decline. The present century has seen the entry of a new class into rural society, particularly in certain parts of the country, week-enders and retired professional and business people coming from the large towns. In some places there are complaints of competition from some of them for the cottages of the local working people, but with possible exceptions in parts of the suburban counties, the effect of such competition is, probably, much exaggerated, while elsewhere none of these immigrants are important

numerically. Week-enders contribute little to village life, and the retired folk, though anxious, no doubt, to be good neighbours, have all too short a time in which to be assimilated to their new environment.

To state the problems of the countryside fully, yet, at the same time, fairly, is to paint a picture which few people will face. Most town dwellers, probably, have a nostalgic feeling for the countryside which is almost entirely sentimental. No one ventures to doubt the suitability of the ancient agricultural lay-out for modern farm practice; on the contrary, there is general regret for the passing of the horse-teams, the gaily painted wagons, the lines of men and women swathe-turning in the hayfield, and the men tying and stooking sheaves behind the old sail-reaper. Rural arts and crafts, where they survive, here and there, are maintained by heavy patronage, which alone enables them to overcome their inherent economic weaknesses. Everyone delights to look at the old villages. No one detects the absence of the damp-courses in the cottages. No one thinks what family life must be like cooped up in the few small rooms behind the tiny casements, without water supply, sewerage or lighting. No one seems to wonder what opportunities the land presents for the economic and social advancement of its wage-workers, nor what sort of a cultural and social life these picture-postcard places can afford. If the facts be faced, the problems of the countryside are how to bring about a regeneration of almost every condition of life within it—how

to free farming from its position as a parasitic industry; how to give farm workers a comparable wage and economic opportunity; how to reintroduce industries offering employment alternative to agriculture; how to apply to rural districts the higher standards of housing and public services which are spreading rapidly in the urban areas; how to raise the standards of education, recreation, and social services and activities of all kinds, to the levels at which they are available to the rest of the nation to-day. The alternative can only be a countryside dependent upon public assistance and drained of all that is best in its human element, the young and the enterprising.

This analysis of the structure of rural society and the statement of the problems it suggests are put forward, of course, as a generalization, for it must be remembered that English villages show a diversity of character which is almost infinite. In size, they may range from hamlets of a hundred people, or fewer, to places which could be described as small towns, with two or three thousand inhabitants. In plan, they may vary from the compact settlement round a village green or at four cross-roads, to a roadside ribbon development of a mile or more, or to parishes without a nucleus or any noticeable concentrations of population within them. There is the feudal village clustering under the shadow of the great house; the village in which everyone works for one or two big farmers; the community of small working farmers, all of them master men; the mining

village; the suburban or dormitory village; the community part agricultural and part dependent on some local industry; the village which is a tourists' place of pilgrimage, and others which are combinations of any of these types in varying proportions. Can any general principles be found, governing their improvement, which are common to them all?

A fishing village in Cornwall may differ from a community of market gardeners in north Kent as much as both of them will differ from a pastoral settlement in Westmorland or in the Yorkshire Dales, but everywhere the basic human needs are the same. All English villagers are subject to the same laws, they have the same structure of local government and the same system of education. All of them want to enjoy good health in homes of a reasonable standard of comfort, and to have regular and satisfying work; they need spiritual ministration, the company of their fellows, leisure and recreation; they want opportunities in life for themselves and for their children, and security for their old age. How far are these things available to them, to-day, and what are the changes needed if they are to have them in greater abundance?

This is a time of planning. By far the greater part of the nation has been taken from its peace-time pursuits for the fighting services or for the production of munitions of war, and it is recognized that the reinstatement of so many into a more normal way of life after some six years of dislocation of every human activity will call for all the ingenuity and forethought of the State. Royal Commissions and Com-

mittees have been set up to investigate the particular problems of the utilization of the land in the public interest, and they have presented their reports. White Papers setting forth the views of the Government on certain social questions have been issued, such as those on the health services, unemployment policy, local government, water supply. And there have been Bills and Acts of Parliament to give effect to Government policy towards certain matters, on town and country planning, education, and family allowances.

These are matters, all of them, of national concern, and it is right that they should be treated nationally. Nor is there anything in the reports, papers, bills or acts which excludes the countryman from the reforms and benefits which they propose. At the same time, the perusal of them, or of some of them, gives a sharp reminder that Britain is an industrial country, that not more than a tenth of her people are concerned directly with the land, and that it is the greater good of the urban majority which dictates, in the main, the shape of things to come. In the following chapters, the problems of reconstruction and improvement are considered, on the other hand, from the countryman's angle. The handicaps and disabilities of his life are set out, and the measures taken or proposed by the Government for the improvement of the economic and social life of the country are examined in their applications to him. At the same time, other problems emerge which are peculiar to the countryside, and these must be faced and solved if the steady depopulation of rural England is to be stayed, and agriculture is to play its part in the economic life of the nation.

CHAPTER II

PROBLEMS OF THE LAND

‘It is nearly certain that the gradual development of manufacturing in other countries, and the necessity in future of paying by current exports for a larger proportion of Britain’s imports, will make it desirable to diminish the dependence of Britain upon food from overseas. This should be done not by protecting old-fashioned methods and not by maintaining a low-paid agricultural population, but by putting at least as much capital, ability and research into agriculture as in the past have been put into manufacturing.’*

Thus Sir William Beveridge, in his own summary of his report on the methods of preventing mass unemployment. He has no doubts about the part which agriculture must play in national economy, nor, apparently, about the need for a reconsideration of its organization. Farmers and their organizations have long been deploring the neglect, as they describe it, by British industrialists, of the rural market, and since the war, other representatives of the landed interest, some of the political parties and even some industrialists themselves, have issued statements in agreement with Sir William Beveridge’s desire to diminish the dependence of Britain upon food from overseas. Here, however, the agreement seems to stop. It is

* *Full Employment in a Free Society*. A Summary by Sir William Beveridge. *New Statesman and Nation* and *Reynolds News*, 1944.

implicit in the farmers' statements that the great expansion of agriculture in this country, under the stimulus of war-time control of production and war-time prices, has raised the efficiency standard of the industry to its peak point, whereas it is quite clear that Sir William Beveridge thinks it has still a long way to go.

The difference here is fundamental. Agriculture, to-day, is more heavily subsidized, probably, than any industry in the country. When the farmers point to the market of £500 millions or so which their industry provides, as an inducement to the manufacturers for export to look nearer home, they forget that a large part of this market, possibly so much as one-half of it, is provided by the taxpayer. They assume, also, that the farming business can be left to the farmers, who know best what their land can produce and who are farming it as efficiently as it can be farmed. It is implied, further, that the lay-out of farms and fields and their equipment with houses and buildings, drainage, water supply and so forth, is the best possible. These are matters of first-class importance, each of which must be established beyond any question if the country is to accept the farmers' claim to be protected against 'unfair' competition.

Policies for the development of farming have appeared in plenty, in recent years. Those of the political parties and groups differ sharply on questions such as who should own the land. Those of the various sections of the landed interest differ in their emphasis, the landowners attaching more importance to remis-

sions of taxation, the farmers to control of the market, and the workers to control of wages and improved conditions of living. In all of them, however, there is implicit agreement that nothing need be done about farms and farmers. Indeed, it might be said that the common ground in every reconstruction policy for British agriculture is the assumption that it is ordained to be an industry of little individualists farming little holdings, with little knowledge of the physical and biological sciences upon which the success of all their technical work depends. Disregarding holdings, not exceeding 5 acres, the position is that 85 per cent of the farms of Great Britain, representing 47 per cent of the cultivated land, do not exceed 150 acres in size. In England, there were only 334 holdings out of some 390,000 which were returned as being more than 1000 acres in size in the last year for which agricultural statistics are available (1938). All the proposals for the reorganization of farming to meet the post-war circumstances and needs of the country are based upon the presumption that this distribution of the land is fixed and immutable. Here and there, individual writers go even further, and proclaim positively that farms of 100-200 acres not only are characteristic of British agriculture but, also, that they are of the type best suited to develop the sturdy independence and individualism of the British character.

The fact is, of course, that this organization of small-scale capitalists, working in complete independence and isolation, has characterized British farming only for a very short time, say 200 years at

most. Farms were smaller still in pre-inclosure times, but the farmer was by no means independent of his neighbours or working in isolation. The evolution of larger holdings came with the opportunities for commercial farming, and speaking generally, the limit to their size was soon reached, because there was no economic advantage in bigger farms, having regard to the technical knowledge and equipment available in those times. In the days of horse-labour, of man-power at one-and-six a day and of wheat at sixty shillings a quarter, with little machinery, few artificial fertilizers and no cheap imported feeding stuffs, this meant the farm of 100-200 acres, worked by the farmer, his family, and two or three hired men. To-day, these same little food factories survive unchanged and unchallenged all over the country, although every process and every condition of food production from them has undergone a revolution.

The inclosure of the open fields and commons, and the reassembly of the land in small fields attached to farm-houses and buildings to make farming units, may be said to have been finished by the middle of last century—say, a hundred years ago. There followed some thirty years of great activity and progress on the land, the Golden Age of British farming. Land was drained, farm-houses, farm buildings and cottages were rebuilt; science was coming to the aid of the farmer to increase soil fertility; mechanical invention was multiplying the output of manual labour; there is every reason to suppose that the farms themselves were being adapted, as opportunity offered, to the

changing farming technique. Whatever progress was being made, however, in the enlargement of farms and fields and in their re-equipment, to meet advances which mechanization and other changes in the organization of production required, all of it was brought abruptly to a standstill by the great agricultural slump of the eighties and nineties of last century. Farmers and landlords lost half their capital during those years, and although the industry had touched bottom by the early years of the present century and had found a new *modus vivendi*, the old confidence and enterprise engendered by a generation of prosperity have never been recaptured. The effect of this was noticeable, particularly, upon the holdings themselves and on their permanent equipment. Farmers, anxious to reduce their costs of production and to increase their output, had turned from arable cultivation to grassland, and they were not slow to take advantage of cheap imported feeding stuffs to enable them to increase the numbers of their livestock, without having to produce the crops which fed them; in a lesser degree, also, they were using the cheap mineral fertilizers available to them, to increase the output of such crops as they were still growing. Above all, in their efforts to reduce their labour costs, they were adopting the many forms of machines produced in greater and greater variety during this century, and culminating in the agricultural tractor.

These activities and adaptations on the farmers' part had no parallel in the part played by the land-

lords in the agricultural partnership. Rents had fallen by 50 per cent, and those with no sources of income other than their agricultural estates curtailed their expenditure on the maintenance of the farms and on the re-equipment needed, from time to time, to meet changing conditions. Those with other resources found investments for them more profitable than on the land.

The results are apparent all over the country. Farms, fields and homesteads appear, to-day, as they were defined and equipped perhaps a hundred years ago, or more, for other types of farming conducted by other methods. Then, corn-growing, meat production, butter and cheese-making, supplied the commodities which the nation needed most, before the prairies and the cattle ranches of North and South America, the sheep runs and dairy farms of Australia and New Zealand, and the peasant holdings of many European countries, were exchanging great quantities of these foods for British manufactures. Then, too, small farms and small irregular fields were suited well enough to the capacities and methods of working farmers, before the days when scientific and technical education were required if farm management was to be efficient; before the tractor and its accessories had come to demand larger and more regular fields to give them full scope, and larger farms to carry their capital cost. Then, again, the homesteads, with their great barns and threshing floors, their bullock-sheds and great open yards, were well adapted to the systems of farming for corn and meat which prevailed.

before grassland and livestock had displaced ploughland and corn, and dairy cattle had superseded the beef herd in so many parts of the country.

Speaking of the country as a whole, it is not too much to say that food production is being carried on under severe handicaps. Consider the farms on that half of the cultivated land which is occupied in holdings not exceeding 150 acres. Some of the little ones, of course, are market gardens, intensively farmed; others of them are grouped, two or more under one farmer; others, again, are part-time holdings, the occupiers having other trades. The market-garden holdings may be eliminated from this consideration, with some reserve, but it is obvious that several small farms controlled by one farmer but separated from each other, do not make one efficient unit, and that a small farm is a small farm, whether the occupier gives all or only part of his attention to it. Every system of farming is practised on these small holdings, depending on the locality in which they lie and upon the fancy of the farmer, but in a country now so completely industrialized as Britain, any organization of food production on this scale must be an anachronism. Consider the holdings in the arable farming districts where corn-growing is practised. War-time organization has established something which was already becoming clear, namely, that the highest efficiency in corn production can be achieved only by the fullest use of machinery. Land must be tilled not by a man with horses who will be hard put to it to plough an acre a day, but by a man

with a tractor who can do from three to six times as much. No longer must corn be cut with a reaper-and-binder, the sheaves stooked in the field, pitched into wagons when dry, carried to the stackyard, built up into ricks, thatched, and in due course pulled to pieces again to put through the threshing machine. The cost of most of these operations can be eliminated, nowadays, by the combine-harvester, which cuts the corn, threshes it and fills it into sacks as it goes round the field. But full employment for a combine-harvester requires not less than 200 acres of corn, and as the corn area will rarely cover more than half the ploughland of the farm, this means not less than 400 acres of arable land, or a farm of some 600 acres as a minimum, when a due proportion of grassland is included.

At the other end of the scale is the small grassland farm devoted either to milk production or to stock-raising. Milk, to-day, takes first place in the human dietary, and the importance of larger, cleaner and cheaper supplies cannot be exaggerated. Large supplies depend, to no small extent, upon better herds, in which the average milk yield of the cows has been raised by careful attention to selection and breeding, and by records of individual performance. Clean milk calls for clean milking sheds, cleanliness in the milker, and an ample water supply for cooling, sterilizing, and general use. Cheap milk is largely a question, once more, of mechanical power to increase the output of each pair of hands. In each and all of these matters, the advantage lies with the large

producers, with capital at their command to install the necessary plant, with education to appreciate the value of records and the detection and elimination of disease, and operating on a scale large enough to employ mechanical milkers.

As for stock-raising, it is commonly asserted that the small farmer has an advantage in that he and his family give a degree of personal care and attention to his animals which cannot be expected of the hireling stockman of the larger farmer. Experience of stock markets does not bear this out. It is the large breeders who buy the best sires; it is their stock which wins the prizes at the shows and makes the highest prices at the sales.

Between the arable farmer and the dairy or stock farmer is the large class of 'mixed' farmers, doing a little of most things on their small farms not exceeding 150 acres. All that has been said about the handicaps of the small arable and livestock specialists applies with even greater force to them, because the greater the number of the commodities with which they are concerned, the smaller the scale upon which each of them is produced.

Thus, taking all types of farming together, it is a fair generalization to say that on nearly half the land of Britain (47 per cent) the standard of efficiency in food production is condemned to be a long way below the maximum attainable.

Over the other half of the land farming is practised on larger holdings, of course, but some 75 per cent of them fall in the category, 150-300 acres, and

for arable farming by modern methods they suffer from all the disabilities enumerated above. For the rest, it must not be assumed that the arable farms which are large enough for the use of mechanical equipment, and the dairy farms on which milking machinery, either fixed or in the travelling milking bail, can be used, are always efficient units of production. There are the questions of their lay-out and permanent equipment. A study of the lay-out of farms discloses serious defects in many of them. Too often there is lack of compactness, the farm being drawn out and narrow, or irregularly shaped, or it lies in two or more parcels. Its shape may necessitate long occupation roads, expensive to maintain in good repair and a handicap to farm transport if not kept up. The farm may be intersected by a railway, or by a main road across which dairy stock may have to be driven daily for milking. The farmhouse and buildings may be badly placed for administration, and the farm cottages remote from roads, shops and schools. A survey of fifteen parishes made recently in a midland county disclosed that of the farms of 50 acres and upwards, which covered more than 90 per cent of the area, the lay-out of no fewer than 70 per cent of them stood in need of improvement. This was without reference, of course, to the rearrangement which would be necessary to give full scope to modern machinery and equipment; they were badly laid out when judged by any standard. It may be said, in fact, that the lay-out of the farms of Britain follows no recognizable

plan and that it incorporates a large measure of inconvenience.*

Next, to consider the permanent equipment of farms. It has been pointed out already that the evolution of agricultural holdings received a severe check when the fall in farmers' prices led to the fall in landlords' rents, towards the end of the last century. Since that time, the amount of reconstruction of old buildings and of erection of new has been quite inadequate to that which changes in agricultural practice have required. Farms once mainly arable land, for corn-growing and bullock feeding, have become farms mainly grassland, for milk production, and yet the great barns remain as when they were first erected for corn storage and threshing, functioning to-day as indifferent food and manure stores, or as implement sheds, maintained in some sort of repair at considerable expense, or more often, perhaps, disintegrating slowly by neglect. The bullock sheds and yards stand empty, or are used for wintering a few heifers, while here and there they have been converted into not very good cowsheds. Efficiency in farming would have required the removal of much of this equipment and the erection of new, designed to fit the changing course of husbandry. The capital has not been available, however, and the industry has had to carry on with makeshift adaptations.†

* See *Country Planning*, by the Agricultural Economics Research Institute, p. 43. Oxford University Press. 1944.

† One of the difficulties of the re-equipment of the land is that former generations have often built too well, and the

In other ways, the equipment of the land has stood still. Much of the under-drainage of the strong lands, which was undertaken so vigorously from the middle of last century up to the early years of the agricultural depression, has long ceased to function. At best, the effective life of a field drainage system hardly exceeds thirty years, but it is the rarest thing to find that renovation or renewal has regularly been effected, and the efficiency of cultivation and the productivity of the land have suffered accordingly. Progress in other directions, too, has ceased. The change from farm horses to the agricultural tractor called for improvements in farm roads, the enlargement of field gateways and provision for housing the tractor and all the machines associated with it, but on the great majority of farms the old equipment has to make do. It must be admitted that many of the farms, indeed the majority of them, are not large enough to justify such an expenditure, but that is an argument for larger holdings, not one for poor equipment.

Then there is the question of water supply. It is probable that there are few matters of greater urgency in the rehabilitation of the countryside in general and of farming in particular, than the provision everywhere of adequate water supplies. On the great majority of farms it is deficient. A few are fortunate demolition of fine old buildings, however obsolete they may be, was not lightly to be undertaken. There is a strong case for the erection of lighter structures in agricultural building, for their immediate cost would be less and they would more readily be removed when the time for their replacement came.

in that springs and streams have been available, or easily adapted, to give constant supplies not only to farm buildings but to all the fields. Here and there the landlord or the owner-occupier, by means of a bore-hole and wind-engine or by a stream and a hydraulic ram, may have filled a reservoir at the top of the farm from which water gravitates for the same purposes. More rarely still, a public water supply has been tapped and laid on. In general, however, the usual experience is that a proportion of the fields are useless to livestock because they are not watered, and the lack is the more serious to-day, when the practice of alternate husbandry puts every field under grass for one or more years in rotation, and milk-production, with its demand for ample supplies for cooling and for the cleansing of utensils and cow-sheds, has become the most important branch of farming.

Besides the handicaps on efficiency in farming due to the smallness of the unit, there is the further handicap, in many places, of the smallness of the fields of which it is composed. Here and there, landlords and farmers have recognized the need for adjusting their field boundaries to the scope of the agricultural tractor. Some hedges have been removed, others have been straightened, and hedgerow timber, so detrimental to good arable farming, has been reduced. Over large areas, however, the fields remain as they were first inclosed from the furlongs of the open fields, for the practice of other systems of husbandry carried out by other forms of power.

One of the most important factors in commercial farming under modern conditions is that of management, and this is the next problem for consideration. In modern industry, management has become a science in itself. In the larger enterprises, the technical knowledge is supplied, for the most part, by specialists, leaving the manager free to control policy and to direct administration. 'The manager who is 100 per cent efficient in his own business, is 90 per cent efficient in any other.' In the smaller businesses, management and technical knowledge must necessarily go hand-in-hand. In all of them, however, a high degree of ability is required in the successful manager, combined with professional and often with technical training acquired over a considerable period. Briefly, management plays an essential part in the organization of production, and there can be no scope for it on the little farms which comprise by far the greater part of British agriculture. The young man, well-educated, able and ambitious, can take his pick of any profession or business in the country, knowing that by use of his brains and industry he is certain to rise in it. Not so with farming, for in the first place he cannot occupy land unless he be equipped with capital to invest in stocking it, and in the second, he will find that these little businesses of a few score acres are blind alleys, offering no scope for the application of his education and ability.

As a consequence, farming in this country has to look to men who are qualified only partially for the important work of food production. The great

majority of them are themselves the sons of small farmers, and they have grown up to perform the manual operations of the farm with considerable skill; they know when and how to cultivate the land for the different crops, and they have acquired an eye for livestock. But most of them have had no general education since elementary school age, and no instruction at all in the natural sciences necessary for a full understanding of the growth of crops and stock. This is no reflexion on them. They do well, within the limits of their capacity, and, as has just been pointed out, farming as organized to-day has nothing to offer to the man with qualifications higher than theirs. This is why farmers, as a class, have never taken much advantage of the technical education available to them. It is some fifty years since the first agricultural colleges and University agricultural departments were founded, and almost a generation since the Farm Institutes were set up in different parts of the country to give a more technical and practical type of instruction. But it is still unusual to find many working farmers amongst their old members, and the majority of students of the Colleges find their opportunities in land administration at home or abroad, in technical administration in the plantation industries, or in the great and growing agricultural advisory service set up by the Ministry of Agriculture all over the country to supply the deficiencies in the farmers' education, a State service for which there is no parallel in any other industry.

• Farming, however, continues to attract farmers.

Notwithstanding the need for the reconstruction of farming units and the training of men to manage them, the supply of small capitalists to occupy small farms presents no problem. Landlords can always find tenants of a sort, even in times of depression, and for farms however badly planned and equipped. The problem, under the present lay-out of the industry, is how to satisfy labour. The decline in the number of agricultural workers, amounting to nearly 50 per cent in the last two generations, has been mentioned already, and not all of it is due to changes in farming systems and the greater use of machinery. Certain categories of labour, particularly, are declining, as the conditions of work are unattractive to young men in the face of alternative opportunities. It is a commonplace, for example, that shepherds are hard to find, and milkers have been in short supply in every dairying district of England, except, perhaps, those in which family labour predominates on the farms. Shepherding and milking call for work on every day of the week and in every week of the year, conditions of employment for which there are many parallels in other industries. Unlike them, however, the scale of operations on the land is too small to maintain the additional labour necessary if men are to be given one day off in seven, and the Saturday half-day. The extra time worked is compensated, of course, by overtime payments, but this is no real compensation for the young man who wants to play football on Saturday afternoons or to take his girl out on Sunday.

For the general body of farm labour, as well as for the special categories, there is the inescapable dullness of life in the tiny communities which make up so large a part of the countryside, many of them too small for any organized social life. There is also the indifferent housing accommodation, the lack of public services and shopping facilities, the inferior opportunities, educational and social, for their children. All of these things are contrasted by the younger generation, of both sexes, with the amenities and opportunities of town life. There is a real foundation to the 'lure of the town', and this is not always appreciated by those who can afford to live comfortably in the country and to escape from it at reasonable intervals.

The smallness of the farming units contributes in another way to the discontent of the workers. It offers no opportunity for advancement to the skilled and ambitious man. A cowman milking and feeding eight or ten cows might be competent to supervise a herd of two hundred. A tractor driver, given the opportunity, might be able to take charge of half a dozen tractors and all the machines associated with them, and to organize the work of the men who use them. Opportunities of this sort are common in industrial life, and they carry with them proportionate advantages in pay and in status. But there is no parallel for them throughout the length and breadth of rural England, except on a handful of farms. A young worker of 20 is entitled to a man's wage, as fixed by the Agricultural Wages Board, and

he has nothing further to hope for until he qualifies for his old-age pension, except it be by the sacrifice of his leisure to earn overtime pay.

The small farms of England create the type of small working farmers who occupy them, and these, no doubt, have the life and opportunity which satisfies them. They have nothing, however, to offer the wage-worker whose only chance of advancement under the industrial system lies in an organization large enough to give him scope for the full exercise of his powers, not only as a manual labourer but also in positions of responsibility. This is not an argument against the preservation of certain numbers of *bona fide* small-holdings, where the labour is family labour and the rate of wages is not a real factor. In some parts of the country, more particularly in its western half, farms of this type are traditional. Many of them are part-time holdings, the head of the family having a subsidiary occupation, or an occupation, it may be, to which his holding is subsidiary. Many of them have net family incomes which are lower than those which the families would have earned as wage-workers. These conditions, however, are self-imposed, no one else is constrained to submit to them, and so long as there are men who desire this form of life, these family holdings may continue. Their economic strength is considerable, for their cash costs are low. Rent is the largest outgoing, and purchases of seeds, feeding stuffs and fertilizers almost the only others. In bad times, their returns will be low and their standard of living poor, but some margin, however

small, may be expected, whatever the state of the markets.

It is the farms a little larger than these family farms which constitute the great weakness of English agriculture, the farms which are too large to be worked without some hired labour, and too small to use it efficiently with the labour-aiding machinery of the many kinds now available, while lacking also the administrative and technical knowledge of the educated and trained manager. These are the farms which are proclaimed, truly enough, as being typical of our farming industry, and their economic weakness has shown itself in the cry for State assistance which now forms the basis of every agricultural policy.

All of these problems of the land, its use, equipment and administration, may be summarized in the problem of the provision of capital. The standard of technical efficiency in farming is fairly good, having regard to all the handicaps which have been indicated. It is the economic efficiency of agriculture which is seriously in question, and the lay-out and the equipment of the land for competitive production of food has stood still for so long, while revolutionary changes in technical processes have been going on, that the capital investment needed now to put the industry on a proper footing must be very great. The timely and continuous investment of capital in the reassembly of fields and farms and in their re-equipment with buildings, roads and so forth, as technical progress demanded, all of which

was forthcoming throughout most of the nineteenth century, would have kept the structure of the industry abreast of the times. But the collapse which occurred at the end of that century cut off the flow of capital back into the land completely, and it was never revived until the State stepped in, recently, to subsidize a few permanent improvements as part of the war-time food-production campaign. The greatest problem of all with which the countryside will be confronted in the post-war world is how to repair the neglect of capital investment in the past two generations.

Consider the position of an estate as it was at the beginning and at the end of that period, say in 1880 and in 1939. As a general proposition, it may be taken that the rental value had been halved during this time, while the costs of maintaining the property in a state of farming efficiency, by the timely repair and replacement of its permanent equipment, had changed, if at all, upward rather than downward. It follows that the net income of the estate available for the landowner's personal expenditure would be severely reduced, if the maintenance of his property had always been regarded as the first charge upon the rental.

From the condition of most of the agricultural land of England to-day, it is quite evident that it has not been thus regarded. Landlords had to choose between heavy retrenchments in their personal expenditure or in their expenditure on estate maintenance, and they chose, generally, to make a

compromise between the two. The consequences of the neglect of repairs to farm buildings which was involved were not immediately apparent, and there was behind it the hope that things might soon take a turn for the better. It was to be some five and twenty long years, however, before any improvement occurred, and agricultural equipment has never recovered from the condition into which it fell between 1880 and 1906. Farming had adjusted itself by the latter date to the lower price-level, and it has carried on, with varying success, up to the present day, but the heart had gone out of landowning, and the high standards of maintenance and replacement of the middle decades of the last century have never been recaptured.

The requisites for an efficient agricultural industry have already been defined. To recapitulate, there is a need all over the country, though varying in degree, for a reassembly of farms—often to bring them into more compact units, so as to save loss of time in getting about them, but more commonly still to get them into units large enough to justify a capital outlay by their tenants upon modern labour-aiding machinery. There is a need, also, for a replanning and often for a resiting of farm buildings, so as to remedy the obsolescence and inconvenience from which so much of this equipment suffers and to bring it into line with the requirements of modern farming technique.

‘The ordinary farmer and the ordinary farm hand to-day are drudges. For one year I experienced the

sort of life that is theirs. During all this time I worked in conditions which made every job doubly as hard as it need have been, because of lack of proper equipment, or because of lack of time to undertake tasks which, once performed, could have eased for ever the daily toil. I carried buckets where taps might have been laid on, I lifted gates which could have been properly hung, I slopped through holes which a load of stones could have filled, I wasted hay under the feet of stock which would have fed better from racks, I walked miles that the smallest degree of planning could have reduced to yards, I wasted with a hurricane lamp hours which an electric-light switch might have saved.*

Re-equipment calls, also, for the erection of new cottages and the extensive reconditioning of old ones, together with the provision of the principal public services—light, water and sewerage. In the great days of British farming, all of these matters, in so far as they arose, were the duty of the landlords, and they were recognized by them as a first charge upon rents. All of them remain, nominally, their obligation at the present day, but clearly a task of such complete reorganization would be beyond the means of most of them now.

There is a fundamental inertia about agriculture which seems to militate against any general or sustained demand by the parties to it, whether landlord or tenant, for higher standards of efficiency, and it has produced a tolerance of irregularities and even of breaches of contracts which is found in no other

* Frances Donaldson, *Four Years' Harvest*, p. 112. Faber and Faber. 1945.

industry. Covenants by the landlord to maintain the permanent equipment in good repair, covenants by the tenant to farm in a husbandlike manner, are broken constantly without any attempt by either party to enforce them. There is no evidence of any demand, within the industry, for the general reconstruction and overhaul that seems to be needed before farming can be said to be reasonably efficient.

However, is this task so formidable as it seems? Given the abandonment of the attitude, too often taken up by spokesmen for the landed interest, that it can do nothing to help itself, and the substitution of a determination on the part of landowners to face the issues with greater courage, does not the State assistance which is being given in so many ways, to-day, for the rehabilitation of the land, put an entirely different complexion upon the task which confronts them? It is conceded, for example, that the higher standards of comfort demanded by public opinion for rural workers, particularly when associated with a traditional system of house rents which have no relation to building costs, have necessitated the transfer to the State of the landowner's responsibility for rural housing. Nor is it expected that the more modern services of the house, such as running water, sewerage and electricity, can be provided by private enterprise. All these matters represent a heavy burden transferred from the shoulders of the landowner to the public purse, while, at the same time, more positive help in the re-equipment of his land is available for him, to-day, in the form of cash

subsidies. So much as 50 per cent of the cost of bringing water to farm buildings and fields, of cleaning out ditches and watercourses, of land drainage and reclamation, may be contributed by the State to the improving landlord, in the interests of food production. There is other assistance, also, such as the acreage payment towards the cost of replanting woodlands, and the loans which are offered at low rates of interest for the erection and improvement of farm buildings, and for other permanent works.

With all this help available, both direct and indirect, for the improvement of the permanent equipment of the land, it might seem that nothing remains except that landowners should show a greater disposition to take advantage of it. There is still, however, the need, almost universal, for the rearrangement of the farming unit, to give greater opportunities to management and labour, and to raise the efficiency level of food production. This, while it should not involve landowners in heavy expense, is, probably, the hardest problem which confronts them. On such of the great estates as still remain, it would involve no more than the formulation of plans for regrouping farms and fields, where necessary, to be put into operation gradually, as opportunities were provided when farms fell vacant. But on what constitutes, probably, the greater part of the country, the districts characterized by small estates interspersed with owner-occupied farms of all sizes, the rectification of boundaries for the reconstitution of farms in more efficient units would be a formidable

business, involving, as it would, much give and take between adjacent owners—a task difficult enough to arrange when all parties were willing negotiators, and impossible, in the absence of statutory powers, if even one of them were not.

A hundred years ago and more, adjustments no less complicated or difficult were going on in many parts of the country, initiated by private action and enforced by Acts of Parliament—the Inclosure Acts. In those days there was much intermingling of property wherever the open-field system of husbandry prevailed. Freeholders, both large and small, held their land in multitudinous little parcels alternating one with another through the big open fields, and though they were occupied in severalty for cultivation and cropping, either by the freeholders or by their tenants, there were seasons of the year when they were thrown together for grazing in common. With the advances in farming technique, and growing opportunities for commercial farming, the simple efficiency of the system for self-sufficing communities became a stumbling-block to progress. The consensus of opinion, crystallizing at various times in different places, led, ultimately, to a reallocation of all the land in compact estates and farms. The work of reconstruction often was obstructed, and it had to overcome many difficulties. It was carried out, often, with nothing more than rough justice to some of the persons concerned, and not always with that. But inclosure was needed if the nation was to be fed, and if there were to be opportunities for individual enter-

prise unrestricted by the drag of the less progressive members of the farming community.

It is suggested that progressive landowners and farmers are, to-day, in a position similar to that of their predecessors in the eighteenth century. That is to say, agricultural technique once more has staged an advance, and it has rendered obsolete the allocation of the land in fields and farms as made after inclosure. Can the landowners of to-day collaborate with the State to re-equip their land for modern farming, with the aid of the generous financial assistance now available to them? Can they collaborate with each other to bring about the rectification of boundaries which is needed, in so many districts, if the present assembly of the land in farms is to be brought up to date?

Here is a policy which will call for enterprise in the landowner such as he has not displayed since his confidence was first shaken in the days of the great agricultural depression. It will call for courage and for a faith in the future of the land. The improving landlords of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries had a reasonable assurance of profit. To-day, the future is more obscure, but given the tools it is difficult to believe that British farming cannot compete successfully in the world market. Failing a response by landowners to the challenge of the times, the only alternatives appear to be, either to continue in the present policy of despair by seeking to establish agriculture permanently upon the dole—or, to resign the responsibilities of landownership to the State.

CHAPTER III

PROBLEMS OF THE VILLAGE

Notwithstanding the high average density of the population of Britain as a whole, people in rural England live scattered over the countryside in communities varying in size and all of them clearly defined—the villages. There is no need to attempt a definition of a village, and the old distinction between town and village, conferred by a charter to hold a market, has no relevance in the present connexion. How many rural communities there are could only approximately be computed, but making the arbitrary assumption that any place containing 2000 people and upwards has more of the character of an urban than of a rural society, it may come as a surprise to some to learn how small are the majority of village communities. In the four counties of Devon, Berkshire, Huntingdon and Westmorland, non-industrial counties representative of different parts of England, there are about 772 parishes with populations not exceeding 2000. Of these, only 10 per cent exceed 1000, while 45 per cent, nearly one-half of them, have only 300 people or fewer. The great problem of the countryside is how to make life more abundant to the rank and file of dwellers in these little places.

In their origins, all village communities were based upon agriculture. They consisted of groups of people

farming for subsistence and supplying themselves, for the most part, with all the requisites of life. As time went by, specialization of function within the community developed, and the village tradesmen emerged.

At no period were these village communities large, and it was the conditions of farming which determined their size. Over the greater part of England, the agricultural members of these societies went out daily to their work in the adjacent open fields, and the limits to the distances which it was worth their while to cover in order to reach the remoter strips of the ploughlands, imposed limits on the numbers which the villages could contain. Beyond this distance, advantage lay in the creation of other communities each with its own adjacent lands, rather than in the further expansion of the original ones. It would not be difficult to show, by reference to surviving records of late medieval and more recent times, what was the range of population in the village communities before the days of industrial expansion, and it would emerge, probably, that a community of 500 persons, men, women and children, engaged in agriculture and its ancillary crafts, was large, and that the great majority had barely half so many.*

The progress of farming through the eighteenth

* At Laxton, in Nottinghamshire, there were about 100 persons occupying land in the year 1635, representing, say, a population of 400-500 people. The area of the parish was 3300 acres, and the farthest cultivated points were about 2 miles from the village—say 40 minutes walk for a plough team.

and nineteenth centuries added little to the sizes of the villages. Farming for the market was steadily displacing subsistence farming, land reclamation and inclosure were adding to the cultivated area, and during a few well-defined periods the stimulus of high prices made for the intensification of production. There was much activity in the re-equipment of the land in most parts of the country during the middle decades of last century, associated, of course, with a demand for rural labour of many kinds. Clay pits were opened for the burning of bricks and drainage tiles, and kilns were constructed for lime-burning both for agricultural and building uses. The under-draining of many thousands of acres, the erection of farm-houses, farm buildings and agricultural workers' cottages, employed tradesmen of many kinds. On the other hand, the use of machinery to reduce manual labour in farming was spreading. Drills, horse-hoes and other simple implements were common before the end of the eighteenth century, and the threshing machine soon followed, displacing the steady winter labour of many men on the barn floor. Writing of his tour in England in 1851, the Frenchman, Léonce de Lavergne, commented on the prevalence of the steam plough, and this was soon to be followed by the invention of hay-making machines and of the reaper-and-binder, which was the most important of all the labour-saving machinery at the disposal of farmers up to the end of last century.

Balancing one thing against another, therefore, it is a fair generalization to say that there had been

nothing in the development of farming or rural life to bring about any increase in the size of the villages of England, such as the development of industrial life was bringing about in the towns. On the contrary, the last two decades of last century and the first half of the present one witnessed a steady decline alike in agricultural employment and in rural industries, accompanying the change from arable to grass farming when corn prices broke in the eighties and nineties, and the gradual absorption of individualist village crafts in mass-production enterprises.

It is the smallness of the English village community, and its tendency, in recent times, steadily to get smaller, which is the fundamental problem of the countryside. So much has happened in the past generation, as the result of the concentration of people in towns, to bring about sharply rising standards of comfort and well-being, together with variety of life and opportunity, all of which are denied to the countryman in greater or lesser degree. Communities are too small and the countryman's economic standing is too low for them to bear the financial burden of social betterment in equal degree, under the prevailing systems of central and local government finance, which favour the densely populated areas and penalize the sparsely populated rural districts. Further, there are many places in which social life of any kind is almost impossible, from sheer paucity of population. There are not enough people, young or old, either to do things or to produce leaders.

Consider, first of all, the problem of housing. All

over rural England, to-day, there are people living in houses for which demolition orders would be made if the byelaws of the local sanitary authority were enforced; there are many more whose homes have serious defects. Such is the shortage of decent houses, however, that deficiencies have to be overlooked, even when palpably prejudicial to health, because there is no alternative accommodation for their occupants. Time was, of course, when the provision of houses sufficient for the rural community formed part of the normal equipment of the land. Landowners provided the cottages needed by agriculture and local trade just as they provided farm-houses and buildings. In very many villages there was only one landowner, and all the houses except the parson's were owned by him. New building stopped, however, with the agricultural depression of the eighties, and the rural exodus which followed removed the immediate necessity. Often, since then, there have been more houses than tenants, and in purely agricultural districts numbers of houses have fallen into decay. Even to-day, in many places, the need is for better rather than for more houses, and the evidence of the countryside is that in the more spacious days this need would have been met by the landowners, as a matter of course. The erection of model cottages for the labour needed for his estates, was at once the pride and the hobby of many a nineteenth-century landlord.

All this has passed, and the ownership of property carries no longer any sense of obligation to house

the working-class members of the village community according to modern standards of hygiene and comfort. The landowner's mantle has fallen upon the State, and during the past twenty-five years a series of measures have passed through Parliament, some giving powers and means to local authorities to fill the gap, others designed to stimulate the private landowner again to do something, by offering him financial inducements both for reconditioning and for new construction. As to reconditioning, it cannot be emphasized too strongly that for a number even of the very bad houses the demolition order should not be the remedy. Many of these old houses are interesting and beautiful; they may be built in a local tradition; often their walls are sound and weather-proof. By reconditioning, involving, perhaps, some small addition, or throwing two small houses together, enlarging windows, raising a roof a foot or two, and in other ways, it should be possible, often, to preserve the essential characters of the villages, while eliminating what can only be described as their slum condition.

However, the problem of the supply of more and better houses is not an outcome, in most places, of the smallness of the village.* It is when we come to

* It has been reported recently, however, in the public press, that a regional planning authority in East Anglia is concentrating on the provision of post-war houses all in the bigger centres, in which it will be easier and cheaper to install the main services. Villages of 250 inhabitants and less are regarded as too small, and it is not intended to build further houses in them. (See *News Chronicle*, 4 September 1944.)

the provision of the public services, in which most country places are deplorably deficient, that the size of the community is often the determining factor. Places are too small to carry the overhead costs of transforming the public electric supply. They cannot bear the burden of the cost of water systems or of sewage disposal. Even where water is brought into a village, there is no compulsion upon the owners of house property to bring it into the houses, and standpipes in the street are better than the parish pump or the wells in the gardens only to the extent that they give more constant and often purer supplies. They contribute nothing to the reduction of domestic drudgery, nothing to the comfort associated with baths and internal sanitation.

The deficiency of water supply and sewerage in rural areas is widespread, nor is the problem merely one of the consequent inconvenience. A nation-wide inquiry instigated by the National Federation of Women's Institutes, in 1943, disclosed not only the extent of the deficiency but also conditions dangerous to health and offensive to decency under which many village communities are compelled to live: no water within a quarter of a mile; water contaminated by sewage and cattle pollution; water carted round to houses, a few bucketsfull to each, every other day; pail closets shared by two or more families; their contents shot on to the nearest rubbish heap or carried through the house for a fortnightly street collection; cesspools full to the surface of the ground and seeping into the nearest ditch; recently erected

Council houses draining into the stream which runs through the middle of the village, and so on.

Nor are the householders the only sufferers, for water supplies to many of the elementary schools are also lacking. In more than 50 per cent of the village schools in the twenty-one counties investigated there are nothing but earth or bucket lavatories, and frequently not enough of them. Widespread dissatisfaction with these conditions was expressed by the countrywomen replying to the questionnaire. The rising generation is not going to tolerate life under these conditions, and unless the problem is tackled on a national basis, the rural exodus, already serious, will be accelerated when peace returns and people are free, once more, to move about.*

The lack of public services extends, also, to light and power. There are far too many villages in which electricity is not yet available. In many places into which it has been brought it is of little advantage to the inhabitants, because there is no compulsion on landlords to wire their tenants' houses for it. The usefulness both of water and electricity, where available, is largely stultified, because the working people cannot afford to connect their landlords' houses with the supplies, nor should they be expected to do so. There are two distinct problems here. The absence of supply to the village is the problem of how to serve the small community; the want of services in the house when they are available in the village is a

* *Water and Sewerage Survey*. National Federation of Women's Institutes, 1944.

question of the interpretation of the landlord's obligations.

Then there is the question of all the Health Services provided for the community to-day. It is obvious, of course, that while cottage hospitals may sometimes be available in the smaller country towns, the general hospitals, and particularly the specialist hospitals, must be located in the larger towns. The difficulty of access to them, imposed by distance and the problem of transport, are inseparable from any conditions of rural life. But in its enjoyment of some of the other health services, the doctor, the district nurse, the baby welfare clinic, for example, the small unit of population is penalized. There is no doctor living in the little village; the district nurse must be shared between two or more parishes; mothers are deprived of skilled advice about their babies unless they are prepared to take a journey to find it.

Consider, next, the problem of education in these small places. Education is the birthright of every English child to-day, and upon it depends the part which he or she will be able to play in later life. Now, whatever may be thought of the acquiescence of the squires and of the country parsons in the injustices of the social order of the nineteenth century, it should always be remembered to their credit that many of them were pioneers in supplying the rudiments of education to country children. Throughout the countryside, to-day, the great majority of public elementary schools are non-provided schools; they were built during the nineteenth century by the local

landowners, or by private subscription, aided, in many cases, by 'The National Society for Promoting the Education of the Poor in Conformity with the Principles of the Church of England'. They were established, of course, to instruct the children in the doctrines of the Church, but in the long years before the State had assumed a responsibility for elementary education, these little schools were functioning to provide general instruction in the three R's, with varying degrees of efficiency, of course, but with a fair measure of success when all the circumstances are considered. The novels of Charlotte M. Yonge, Anthony Trollope, and of other Victorian novelists who describe the rural scene, give evidence of the keen personal interest often taken by the squire's lady and by her daughters, as well, of course, as by the parochial clergy, in schools and school teaching.

Towards the end of the century, attendance at school was made, first of all, compulsory, and then, free. The Education Act of 1902 brought all the denominational schools under the administration of new local education authorities, the Education Committees of the County Councils. Under the new provisions, the assertion of the right to continue denominational teaching imposed, also, the obligation to maintain the fabric of the schools, and public funds were not to be available for these purposes. On the other hand, the managers of the Church schools, and of those of other denominations, could retain the right of appointment of teachers, whose

salaries, together with certain other of the school expenses, were to be paid by the county authorities.

Now what is the position of these schools in many of the little villages of England to-day? In the first place, most of their buildings are upwards of a hundred years old. They were built at a time when standards of accommodation and equipment were much lower than they are to-day. Often they are badly sited, being surrounded by houses or up against the churchyard wall, with no room for adequate playgrounds. Whatever improvements may have been effected in urban areas, Church schools in the villages are nearly always too small. This does not mean that there is overcrowding, but it may involve the teaching of several standards in one room. Indeed, schools often consist only of one room, or of one room which has been divided into two, making one of them a passage room, throwing all their proportions wrong and making lighting, heating and ventilation difficult. The porch, or the passage from the door, does duty for a cloakroom; there is no privacy for the teachers, and of course no space adequate for school dinners, or physical training; no rooms for the periodical visits of doctor, dentist and nurse; no facilities for drying wet clothes, and, too often, defective lavatory accommodation.

The failure to keep the school buildings abreast of the times is due, in most places, to the breakdown of financial responsibility for them. Many of them are the private property of the principal landowners of the villages, whose forbears built and maintained

them, but members of the present generation have not the means, nor do they feel it their duty, to meet the demand for modernizing and improvement. Others belong to the School Managers, who have no funds, often, even for repairs, except such as can be raised by private appeals, or grants from Diocesan funds, and these resources are quite inadequate, judged by the results. The obvious remedy would be to hand the schools over to the local education authorities, when repair or reconstruction would follow, but the Church clings to its right to instruct the children in its own doctrines. When the Education Act, 1944, comes into operation, the maintenance of school buildings, which the managers cannot bring up to the recognized standard, will be put on a more satisfactory footing.

It may be assumed, therefore, that rural school buildings will be improved and brought up to date, sooner or later, under the new Act, but poor accommodation is not the only handicap in the education of the country child. In many small villages, the problem of staffing has never been solved. Although the number of children per teacher may be low, the number of age groups which one teacher must handle is often impossibly large, if instruction is to be efficient, with the result that the demands made upon the teacher are unfair. The difficulty in some ways has been aggravated by the separation of seniors and juniors at the age of 11, following the recommendations of the *Consultative Committee on the Education of the Adolescent* (the Hadow Committee), in 1926.

Often there are not enough children of 11 and over to justify a senior department, and they have to be transported to a senior school some miles away. Often, too, there are not enough children left, under 11, to justify a junior school, so these little ones have also to go elsewhere, and the village school is closed. It is generally agreed that the education and training which both groups thus receive in the bigger schools to which they go are of higher standards, but the change is not all gain. What the children lose, particularly the little ones, by having to undertake these daily journeys, by being removed from home discipline, and in other ways, cannot be measured, and it varies, no doubt, with the individual and the home, and with the school. Not all of these reception schools provide school dinners, and a cold lunch brought from home and eaten in the schoolroom must replace the hot midday meal a child needs, while daily journeys on a bicycle in all weathers, or in the school bus without any supervision, have obvious disadvantages.

Where the village can raise enough children to keep the school open for juniors only, there is the problem of the teacher. Does it offer the sort of career to which the keen and competent young woman is likely to be attracted? Even though the smaller salaries payable in rural areas are supposed to reflect no more than the lower cost of living, is it likely that the best teachers will be found in the little villages where school buildings are old and inconvenient, where classes are mixed, where the young teacher

has no colleagues in the school and no intellectual stimulus or social life outside?

It is not surprising to find a growing tendency amongst the younger school teachers to live, not in the small villages in which they teach, but in nearby towns or larger villages from which they can travel daily to their work and return, at its close, to some sort of companionship in the evenings. Thus, they make no contribution to the life of the little community, and the loss to the villages, in many places, is even greater than this. Before the general adoption of the recommendations of the Hadow Committee referred to above, the village school, inclusive of all ages, was presided over, often, by a schoolmaster. He, with his wife and family, was one of the best elements in the village community. His association with the children during all their school life induced a regard, or at least a consideration or respect, which continued, often, during the difficult period of adolescence, with advantages to the individual which were very real, even though not easily defined. What the loss of the resident schoolmaster has meant to village life in general, in many places, is discussed later.

Considering all the circumstances of junior education in the smaller villages, the disabilities which they may impose upon the children in their equipment for life must be obvious. The handicap of inferior buildings and accommodation may not be serious unless bad enough to interfere with physical health, but those which are imposed by the difficulty of

attracting teachers to apply for places in rural schools, by the monotony alike for teacher and taught in one-teacher schools, by the difficulty of segregating age classes, by the lack of the stimulus of competition and by the difficulty of organizing games and other normal school activities, for the small numbers—these constitute real drawbacks for the child and reduce its chances of selection at the critical age of 11 for secondary education. Thus, it is not surprising that some local education authorities reserve a certain number of free places in secondary schools for children from rural schools, as they have found that in open competition with town children too few of them are successful.

This particular difficulty should be remedied when the new Education Act is brought into full operation. There will still be disabilities, however, for the children from the little villages, imposed by the distances which they must travel daily to and from their schools, by contrast with those living in communities large enough to support schools of their own. Bad weather becomes more of a menace to health, chances of joining in games and in the other out-of-classroom activities of the school are reduced, with a proportionate loss of such value as these aids to the formation of character and community sense may possess. Only the provision of boarding schools can remove these difficulties, and while many country parents would welcome them, as the results of an inquiry made not long ago by the National Federation of Women's Institutes showed, there is no

prospect of their adoption at present. The new Act empowers local education authorities to provide residential colleges, at their option, for the part-time further education of boys and girls from 16 to 18 years. It would seem to be of first-rate importance that public opinion should be directed to the absolute necessity for such Colleges to accommodate the young people from rural areas, if they are to enjoy to the full the benefits of the education and training which the Act offers.

County Colleges for part-time education after 16 years, whether for one whole day or two half-days during forty-four weeks, or residential for two months of the year, will have to wait. The prior need for larger and better schools and for more teachers is so great and universal that even the raising of the school-leaving age to 15 has had to be postponed. It may be doubted whether County Colleges are likely to appear within the next ten years, and if so, most of the children at school, to-day, will have passed out into their work in the world without the advantages which this further education might give them. Everyone, except the most reactionary of employers, is agreed that education stops too soon, and this applies with particular force to many of the children now at school. Those who have been evacuated from the bombed areas have suffered from the dislocation of their normal life; some of them have been moved several times, many have been taught in classes which were already far too large, and there have been makeshift arrangements

for sharing school buildings between two or more schools. These conditions have been a severe handicap to them in their education and they have reacted prejudicially, at the same time, upon the children in the reception areas. Might not an effort be made to start the County Colleges at once, without waiting for all that is involved in the raising of the school-leaving age? If children going into employment at 14 could have part-time education suitable to their age, for the two years, 14-16, under the conditions provided in Mr Butler's Act, the benefit to them should be very great. The raising of the school-leaving age to 15, in the future, would call for an adjustment of the College curriculum and the raising of the part-time period of education to 15-17; with the eventual raising of full-time education to 16, the College curriculum would take the form contemplated by the Act, and part-time education would continue until the end of the eighteenth year.

To the country-bred child, particularly, such further education, provided without delay, would be of especial value. Children living in rural districts have few or none of the opportunities of attending evening classes in literary or technical subjects, which are available to the children of town-dwellers at municipal technical schools and other institutions. Colleges for them would have to be residential, for the distances would make attendance by the day difficult for many of them, and by the half-day impossible. Further, the rough and tumble of life in a big community should inculcate a sense of personal responsibility

and self-reliance which grows with difficulty under constant parental supervision in the little village community. The scheme cannot be developed further here, and there are obvious administrative difficulties; but the big country houses, many of which have already been diverted from their original uses, might be used to solve the building problem, even if only temporarily.

To return, now, to the problem of the adolescent in the small village to-day, the boy or girl who has left the neighbouring senior school at the age of 14 and is about to start earning. The choice of occupation is very limited, whether for boys or girls. The big house has gone, for better or worse; for long years it was the great training establishment for domestic service, for gardening and for stable work. When landed estates were larger, too, considerable staffs were employed—bricklayers and masons, carpenters, plumbers, drainers, woodmen, keepers, and so on—for estate maintenance of all kinds, and they were recruited in the locality. Some of this work has gone, some of it, though needed, tends to be neglected, and whatever is done is put out to contract, so that openings in private employment, to-day, are few. Most of the rural industries, too, have gone, together with the tradesmen—tailors, dressmakers, shoemakers—who were features of so many rural communities before the days of factory production. In the conditions prevailing immediately before the war, there was little choice outside agriculture for the boy born in the small village. The problem for

every parent, therefore, and for most boys, too, as soon as they became interested in their future, was how to get in touch with the larger communities where both the demand for labour and the choice before the worker would be greater. It has long been established by the Census figures that there is a great exodus of young people of both sexes from the country after the age of 18 years.

This lack of opportunity for employment has its parallel in the absence of the social activities which young people need. In a village of two or three hundred people, there could not be more than twelve to twenty boys and girls between the ages of 14 and 18, say six to ten of either sex. At what is, perhaps, the most critical period of their lives, the communities in which they live can organize little, if anything, for their amusement, recreation or further education. There are not enough of them to make a side for any team game, to form clubs, to make a class. They can have no private life in these tiny places, where everyone has known them by their Christian names from babyhood. In the larger villages there may be Scout and Guide troops or Young Farmers' Clubs, and sometimes these will draw members from smaller adjacent villages. But only those with initiative sufficient to cause them to look further afield, or those who are fortunate enough to find a leader in their village who will help them, can make any profitable use of their leisure through these organizations, or in other ways.

This difficulty of finding leadership is one of the

outstanding disabilities of the small community, today. The break-up of the agricultural estates and the closing of the country houses or their conversion to other uses; the union of small benefices and the withdrawal of the parson from one of them; the removal of the older children from the village schools and the loss of the schoolmasters—all these things have deprived the small villages of their obvious leaders. There is still a strong feeling of dependence among village people, and the great social changes of the past generation have found them unprepared to assume full responsibility for themselves, as communities. Their characteristic is apathy—apathy towards the Church, towards Local Government, towards social organizations of all kinds, and it can only be overcome by the presence of one or two people capable of showing initiative and leadership. The manifestation of these qualities, of course, is quite fortuitous, but it is obvious that the smaller the community the less likely are leaders to be thrown up, and the more difficult will be their job of organization. In the larger centres of population, people tend to form themselves into groups for activities of all kinds—political, religious, cultural, recreative, social. People associate thus, not because they belong to the same town or because they live in the same street, but because they are interested in the same things, and they draw together round obvious leaders. Thus, a parson, or a Free Church minister, may have a congregation which is not parochial but drawn from all parts of the town, amongst whom he will organize

and lead activities connected with his church. In a similar way, the political parties will organize clubs, the success of which will depend upon the qualities of the party agents as leaders; those interested in education will get in touch with the tutors of the adult education movement and organize courses of lectures and tutorial classes, and there are people of all ages able and willing to promote social and recreative bodies of all kinds—games and dances for the younger ones, whist drives and socials for the older ones. Even hobbies take the form of social activities and are catered for through fanciers' clubs and shows of every kind. From these and many other opportunities for development and amusement, the countryman is cut off to an extent which varies with the size of his community, and while this is not the only cause of much of the dissatisfaction manifest in village life, it is a very important one and some means must be found of bringing similar opportunities into the lives of country people.

In one county, at all events, an attempt was being made before the war to overcome this handicap. In Cambridgeshire, four Village Colleges had been established by the Education Committee between the years 1930 and 1939, each of them serving as the centre of education and community life for groups of about ten villages. The College houses the Senior School for these villages, transport being provided for the children by bicycle or bus, and adult education is organized under the direction of a resident tutor. The activities range from serious academic

study and technical training, to music, drama, physical culture and thence to purely recreational organizations and games of all sorts. Clubs of many kinds are associated with each College, and branches of the County Library are housed there. The equipment for all this work is of a high order, with a good hall and stage, lecture rooms, common rooms and canteen. A free evening transport service, from the satellite villages to each Village College, was in operation before the war, and a restricted service still runs.

These Village Colleges, the creation of Mr Henry Morris, the Director of Education, are based upon the assumption that for much of rural England a full community life is impossible, to-day, within the confines of the small societies of which it is so largely composed. For very many places, these conditions are not likely to be improved materially within the next generation, and only by some combination of groups of such societies can the handicaps of isolation and lack of numbers be mitigated. But while the Village College is the most comprehensive attempt to provide them with a fuller intellectual and social life, it must be recognized that it aggravates, in a certain sense, the very problems that it sets out to mitigate. Not all the people of the small villages can take advantage of the amenities of the College; mothers cannot leave small children, and the older people may be reluctant to undertake the journeys involved. To the extent, therefore, that their neighbours are attracted to the College, the lives of those who are left are socially the poorer. But the College,

of course, is primarily for the younger people, rebelling against the monotony of life in the smaller villages to the point of leaving them at the first opportunity. To the extent, therefore, that the Cambridge-shire Village Colleges open the door to a fuller life, with opportunities for development and recreation reserved, hitherto, mainly for the townsman, they mark an advance, the full value of which may not yet have been realized.

Educational and social opportunities, however, are not sufficient in themselves to keep young people in the country. There must be economic opportunities for them better than many places can offer to-day. The normal increase of the rural population cannot be absorbed in farm work; with the growth of mechanization, employment in farming is declining, and with the disappearance of rural crafts and industries, there are fewer alternatives. This is nothing new, but rather the accentuation of a long-established condition of rural life. With the completion of the inclosure of commons and wastes a hundred years ago, there has been no opportunity for agricultural expansion. Those who deplore the 'drift to the towns', contrasting it with the times when the countryman was content with his pittance of a wage, and with his two-roomed cottage, in which he reared a large family of healthy children whose one ambition was to follow in his footsteps, are talking of a rural England which never existed. Nor could it ever exist except by a general policy of subdivision of holdings, of a return to heavy manual labour and of

a lowering of the standard of living afforded by agricultural employment in this country, to that of the congested peasant states of Central Europe.

What the country-bred youth of to-day demands is better wages, better prospects, better housing, more leisure and the means to enjoy it—and employment on the land, to-day, cannot offer any of them. The drift away from it must continue, with the consequent further impoverishment of rural society. There seems to be one way, and one way only, by which to retain the country-breds in the country, and thereby to improve both economic and social conditions. This is by conscious and deliberate action taken to decentralize industry.

Most people must be aware of country villages which have become dormitories to a nearby industrial town, some of the factory workers in which are dispersed about the neighbouring villages within transport distance. This accommodation of industrial workers in non-industrial places has proceeded, hitherto, without any deliberate direction or conscious planning, and the results may be seriously criticized. Generally there has been no attempt to assimilate the newcomers to the old community. The new houses, run up as private speculations on land adjacent to the villages and sold to their occupants on the hire-purchase system, are housing estates in miniature in their siting, in their architecture and in their occupants. They are something entirely apart from the old village, and the only reason for their location is that the speculator has

been enabled, by his choice of a site, to exploit whatever existing services there may be—roads ready made, transport services already organized, together with access at distances not too great, to shops, schools, places of worship and so forth. Rarely, if ever, can the social advantages which should accrue from the larger unit of population, be realized under a planning scheme which segregates so completely the old inhabitants from the newcomers.

What the country needs more than anything is the repopulation of its villages, and the *Royal Commission on the Distribution of the Industrial Population* (the Barlow Commission) has argued a strong case for the decentralization of industry. By co-operation between public authorities and the leaders of business enterprise, the further expansion of the great industrial centres might be stayed, and new industries not dependent on proximity to their raw materials might be sited in rural districts. By co-operation, again, between the interested parties, the housing of the workers could then be planned deliberately amongst the surrounding villages.

Thus, the decentralization of industry might be expected to serve two purposes. It should prevent the further migration of labour from the country into industrial areas already over-congested, and it would repopulate those villages within transport distance of the factory to the point at which the many disabilities from which these small communities suffer would disappear. Employment alternative to agriculture would be available for those who pre-

ferred it; the natural increase of population could find work without having to leave home; often there would be opportunities in the new factories available to the women and girls as well as to the men. Agriculture itself would benefit from the larger local market for perishable products, milk, eggs, vegetables and fresh foods of all kinds. At once, the obstacles to the provision of public services of all kinds would disappear, and the difficulties of organizing a satisfactory community life in the villages would be greatly mitigated. Instead of the Village College, run by the Local Education Authority, to which senior children were transported for school and the older people for education and recreation, the villages, thus enlarged, would be big enough to support their own institutions, the Senior School for the children and the Community Centre, run by the people themselves, for young and old alike.

This conception of rural reconstruction is based on the fact that employment in agriculture cannot expand, and that with increasing efficiency of organization and equipment it will tend rather to decline; further, on the fact that many village communities are manifestly too small alike to bear the overhead costs of providing better physical conditions, and to support a satisfactory social life. It is at variance with the recommendations of the *Committee on Land Utilization in Rural Areas* (the Scott Committee), which are opposed to the admission of industry, other than rural crafts, to the countryside, and to any modification of the rural scene and of the present.

pattern of agriculture. While the *Report* deplores the 'drift to the towns', there is no attempt to explain how a static farming industry can absorb the annual increment of adolescents in the villages and on the farms, or how the standard of living of the countryman is to be put on a parity with that of the industrial worker, unless the heavy burden of the overhead costs of housing, public services, etc., can be spread over communities made larger by the introduction of industrial workers. The Committee is definitely opposed to any admixture of town with country, and would segregate these two elements of national life one from another. It may be inferred, however, that their conclusions are based on a consideration of the deplorable results of urban overspill into the countryside, and of the uncontrolled development of industrial suburbs in rural settings. The hope is that these activities of the industrialist, in association with the speculative builder and the rural landowner anxious to seize a profit, are shortly to be controlled, and that the location of industry and the housing of its workers may proceed, henceforth, in more orderly manner.*

Conscious planning of the decentralization of industry and of the housing of industrial workers in the villages serving the new factories, there must be, if

* For a full statement of the case against the Scott Committee's conclusions in this matter, readers are referred to the *Minority Report* presented by Professor S. R. Dennison. *Report of the Committee on Land Utilization in Rural Areas*, Cmd. 6378, 1942.

the mistakes of the past are to be avoided. Where new housing has been required, either to provide alternative accommodation when slum clearance was undertaken or to meet a new industrial demand, there has never been any attempt to put the new dwellings on sites available in the village. Always the public authority or the speculative builder has chosen a clean site on its outskirts, where a collection of houses has been erected, conforming, no doubt, to the byelaws but rarely to the local architectural tradition, in which all the newcomers are segregated, away from all contact with their old-established neighbours. The welding of such communities into one social unit is rendered far harder by this segregation, and it explains, no doubt, the references in the *Scott Report* to the 'social disturbance' consequent upon the introduction of industrial life into rural districts.

A survey of any village reveals the many opportunities which present themselves for filling up vacant sites without overcrowding or obstruction. A pair of houses here, a short row there, a single one somewhere else, may make, in the aggregate, a large addition to the accommodation without any appreciable extension of the boundaries. Such a method of going to work would involve the local authority, or the speculator, in a greater number of negotiations over sites, and building costs would be higher owing to the need to remove plant from one site to another. Where public services already existed, however, there would be compensating economies in the cost of connexions with them. If the recommendations,

too, of the *Expert Committee on Compensation and Betterment* (the Uthwatt Committee) are to be implemented, the problem of site acquisition would be simplified.

Another objection to the industrial suburb is the class segregation involved, which militates against the development of a well-knit community life as much as does the physical separation of new and old. Community life in its best manifestations is impossible in a one-class society, and the industrial annexe, occupied by workers engaged in one industry and most of them at one economic level in it, is an unnatural social unit. The professional classes, the tradesmen and traders, the workers in agriculture and industry, the old-age pensioners and the leisured classes, each of them has his part to play in a fully organized community, and it has always been one of the best characteristics of English village life that all of them lived side-by-side and mixed freely.

In the effort to improve conditions of life, physical, economic and social, in hundreds of little village communities, too many of which have nothing to offer to the young men and women of to-day, there should be no looking back, no attempt to restore the conditions of a previous generation. The country districts need repopulating if life and labour in them are to prosper, but this can be achieved only by accepting the evolution of industrial organization as something inevitable, while taking steps at the same time, consciously and deliberately, to break down the segregation of town and country people by which so much of it is characterized.

CHAPTER IV

PROBLEMS OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT

In the last chapter, mention has been made of some of the disabilities of village life, and particularly of life in the smaller villages. Some of these arise directly from the operation of the system of local government in rural areas, and how to reorganize it so that country people may be better served is one of the major problems of the countryside.

It is just half a century since a Local Government Act brought Parish and District Councils into being, thus extending the devolution of administrative authority, following the constitution of the County Councils a few years before. The Parish Council was to preserve and advance the interests of the parish, the smallest administrative unit. The District Council, composed of representatives of parishes, grouped conveniently though arbitrarily to form an administrative area, was to facilitate the administration of matters of joint concern, or of those which called for the employment of professional services beyond the capacity of individual parishes. Thus, the Parish Council would be concerned with the provision and management of allotments, maintenance of footpaths and rights of way, provision and maintenance of burial grounds and other matters of purely parochial concern, for which a Parish Rate could be levied.

The District Council would have responsibility for things such as the administration of the Public Health Acts within the District, the repair of certain highways, and other matters of more than parochial concern, for which a general rate could be levied on all the parishes within the District. The County Council was charged with the care of matters of even wider application, affecting the County as a whole.

Considerable changes have been introduced, of course, since the passing of the Local Government Act, 1894, and as a general comment it would be true to say that there has been a tendency, recently, to reverse the principle of decentralization embodied in this Act and in the earlier one of 1888. Authority has been passing back from the Parish and District Councils to the County Council, and from the County Council to the central administration. At the same time, fresh obligations have been imposed upon some of the local bodies, and there have been extensions of some of those originally contemplated. In the first category, mention may be made of the trunk roads, formerly the concern of the County Councils and now that of the Ministry of Transport, and of the secondary roads, originally the concern of the District Councils, and now of the County Councils. In the second, there is the administration of the various Housing Acts by the District Councils, which has added much to their work, and the responsibility for primary and secondary education placed upon the County Councils by the Education Act of 1902, and later Acts.

All of these bodies, the Parish, District and County

Councils, are elected on a residence franchise, the Parish Councils by show of hands at a Parish Meeting, unless a ballot be demanded, and the District and County Councils by ballot. Each constituent parish sends one representative to the District Council. For the County Council, parishes are grouped in Electoral Districts, each district returning one representative.

Unfortunately, there is general apathy towards the administration of local government in most country places. In parishes, the populations of which do not exceed 300, a Parish Council can be elected only if the Parish Meeting so resolves. Otherwise any parochial business is done at this meeting, if, indeed, anyone can be got to attend. This indifference may be due, partly, to the fact that although the Parish Meeting, and the Parish Council more particularly, have wide fields of action, they are limited, in doing anything which would cost money, to the expenditure of the produce of a *4d.* rate; in many places this means, literally, a few pounds. In the main, therefore, their work has to be confined to representing their desires to higher authorities, the District or the County Councils, and these bodies may, or they may not, be responsive.

District and County Councils hold regular meetings, of course, and they have wide powers, but public indifference extends also to them. Contests for the right to represent a parish on the District Council are almost unknown, the sitting Councillor being renominated so long as he wishes it. For membership of the County Council it is rare to have more than

half a dozen contested elections, and equally rare for so many as 30 per cent of the electorate to go to the poll at these—if a generalization from the experience of a rural county in the Midlands, with a Council of about fifty members, may be admitted. When a Councillor, either District or County, wishes to retire, it is usual for his successor to be chosen by arrangement, and an outside candidature is almost unknown.

The attitude of the countryman to rural administration is one of almost complete detachment. He has never come to regard the District Council or the County Council as being placed in authority by him, merely to carry out his wishes. He talks of local authorities as if they were bodies imposed upon him, to fail, at best, in what he considers their duty, at worst to carry out some sinister purpose to cost him money. 'Why don't "They" do this, or that?' Or, 'Look what "They" are doing at so and so! Just wasting the ratepayers' money!' Always 'They', never 'We'. The Councils, themselves, are apt to be pervaded with the same spirit of indifference. The function of most of the members seems to be limited to making one at meetings of the Council or of Committees of Council, leaving the real work to be done by a mere handful of active members and by the officials, except for items of business in which the interests of a member's parish may be involved. It seems almost impossible for some members to understand that they are there to consider matters of District or County import, and that parochialism, for the most part, is out of place.

It is difficult to explain the causes of this indifference to public administration. Much of it may be attributed to ignorance of the organization of local government, the powers of its administrative bodies and of the rights of the ratepayer, for it is noteworthy that in parishes in which there are one or more public-spirited people, who will organize Parish Meetings to discuss public affairs and to precipitate public opinion so that local needs may be pressed, it is not difficult to develop a social conscience. In places where the Women's Institutes are a real force, too, a more constructive attitude towards local government is often to be found. If a parish or an electoral district have made up their minds that they will no longer tolerate the lack of water, or inadequate scavenging, or deficient transport services, and a candidate can be put up who will undertake to press for reform, public interest is assured. There is no appeal, however, in a call to vote for *A* or *B* in the void, merely as the representative of the parish or district without a mission, and the election goes by default.

The reason why municipal elections create more interest and are often keenly contested is that the practice has grown up, in most large towns, of conducting them on a political basis. There is the 'progressive' candidate, representing left-wing opinion, the 'municipal reform' candidate, representing the parties of the right, and, not infrequently, the 'independent' candidate, well known in political elections, who represents himself. These candidates have definite

programmes to put before the electors, who thus are able to vote for a programme rather than for a person. This is no argument, of course, for the introduction of party politics into the administration of local government in the counties—far from it. It suggests, however, that something could be done to stimulate public interest and a sense of personal responsibility, if candidates for election to local government bodies were more apt to take the electorate into their confidence upon their reasons for coming forward, and as to the work to which they wish to devote themselves, if elected. At present, too many Councillors seem to be concerned, first and foremost, to keep down the rates. Such a limited programme may have an appeal to the principal ratepayers, who feel, and probably rightly, that the extension of public services, for example, in their neighbourhood will give them nothing which they have not already been able to provide for themselves, but it is unlikely to arouse much enthusiasm for local government in the rank and file of the electorate.

Another reason for apathy and indifference is to be found in the composition of the various local administrative bodies, which are drawn almost exclusively from certain classes—the landowners, farmers, clergy, professional and business men—who can afford to devote time to public work. When the Local Government Acts were passed half a century ago, these classes were, perhaps, the only ones who could have composed the Councils. They provided the natural leaders of an uneducated and docile society,

men with 'a stake in the country', and the idea that a working man should concern himself with the affairs of the county, beyond making a cross on a ballot paper, would have been inconceivable. Now, with two generations of popular education, people competent to take part in public affairs are found in all classes, but meetings of District and County Councils and of their committees are held during working hours, and attendance involves very considerable journeys for many of the members, for the cost of which, as also for the loss of time, there is no recompense. Half a century ago, such things as payment to elected representatives of the people, in compensation for loss of time or for repayment of expenses incurred necessarily on public business, had not seriously been considered, nor was it contemplated that working men and women might come, one day, to play useful parts in public administration. All this has changed as regards central government, but there is still no parallel in rural local government for the payment of members nor for the emergence of working men, as such, as candidates for election.

Lastly, there is the problem of the finance of local administration, to which some reference has been made already. This asserts itself all over rural England, and particularly in the more sparsely populated regions. The work of the County, District and Parish Councils is paid for in a variety of ways. The taxpayer contributes to some of the services through Exchequer grants, and for the rest, the costs of local administration are met by local rates levied on the

basis of the annual value of all real property within each administrative area. Agricultural land was de-rated by the Local Government Act, 1929. The area rated may be the County, the Rural District or the Parish, according to the purpose for which the rate is made. For public assistance, for example, for certain highways and for some other matters, the costs of administration are met by rates on the whole county. For certain other matters, the Rural District is the area, and for others, again, of purely local concern, a parish may be the rateable area.*

From the application of these principles, it follows that the funds available for improvements in local administration and for the provision of public services must vary very greatly from county to county, from district to district, or from parish to parish, according to their respective rateable values. A penny rate, for example, in the county of suburban Surrey extending to some 450,000 acres, produces £54,500, whereas the same rate in rural Herefordshire, some 540,000 acres, produces no more than £2,500. The same discrepancies occur between rural districts and, of course, between one parish and another. As a result, it is apparent that the provision of some of the needs and conveniences of modern life is dependent not upon the needs of the communities involved, nor upon the positions of their members as tax- and

* Under the *Local Government Act*, 1933, it is permissive, but not compulsory, to spread the cost of certain items of parochial concern over the whole of the Rural District. Under the *Rural Water Supply and Sewerage Act*, 1944, costs of water supply and sewerage must thus be spread.

ratepayers, but upon the rateable values of the collections of property which happen, more or less arbitrarily, to compose the administrative areas in which they live. Their inhabitants contribute equally, each according to his means, to the National Exchequer, and each, according to the annual value of the property he occupies, to the local rating authority. They have equal needs and are paying equally for the same citizenship, while the services they get may show every kind of inequality.

It is clear that the cost of public services, and of local administration at large, varies inversely, though not, of course, in an exact ratio, with the sizes and concentration of the populations served. There comes a point at which this cost is prohibitive, and people living in sparsely populated administrative areas may have to be content with less of the services, conveniences and amenities of life which those living in more densely populated areas receive as matters of course, or even to forgo some of them altogether. At the same time, the incidence of taxation varies little between town and country, nowadays, the difference being in what is yielded in the aggregate rather than in what is paid by the individual. It is a question whether such a position can be justified, whether a section of the community, the country dwellers, should continue to be handicapped in their lives by a system of public finance under which the country is parcelled out, quite arbitrarily and for all purposes, into the present rigid administrative areas, a system which divides the people into groups of

'haves' and 'have-nots'. The answer, obviously, is that it cannot, and the time seems ripe for a re-examination of the basis of local government.

In its origins, local administration had its roots partly in the parish and partly in the shire, and during the long years in which community life was simple and its essential services rudimentary, this basis was good enough. To-day, when community life is complex, when services for the citizen have been multiplied and are still increasing, it seems that it will serve no longer, if treatment, equal both in services and in opportunities, is to be meted out to all alike. It is true that modern legislation has tried to recognize the changing circumstances by the establishment of other administrative units. Thus, there are the County Boroughs, created under the Local Government Act, 1888, and the Rural Districts, under that of 1894. The County Boroughs are, for the most part, towns of 50,000 inhabitants and upwards, which manage their local affairs entirely, being exempt from the government of the county in which they are situated. The organization and functions of the Rural Districts have been dealt with above (see p. 72).

Whatever may be thought about the expediency of isolating the larger centres of population and giving them self-government, there can be no doubts about the consequences. The exclusion of these bodies from the general administration of the counties in which they are situated has aggravated the difficulty of providing equitable treatment for rural areas. The incidence of the County Boroughs in the various

counties differs, of course, very largely. In Herefordshire and Cornwall, for example, there are none, and the County Councils administer every part of their geographical areas. In Lancashire and Warwickshire, on the other hand, about two-thirds of the people live in County Boroughs. To the extent that the cost of public services—education, housing, health, etc.—is inversely proportionate to the density of the population within the administrative area, it is obvious that the effect of this segregation of parts of the population is to give the townsman cheap services at the expense of the countryman. The assertion that ‘it costs too much’ to provide better schools and more teachers, better housing and more public services, in so many of the villages, is true only because the sparsely populated districts are cut off, for administrative purposes, from the large centres of population and are treated as a problem apart in the provision of decent standards of life and opportunity, for which the solution has not yet been found.

There is no indication in the White Paper on Local Government* that the Minister of Health proposes to reconsider its whole basis in the light of the experience of the past fifty years. No major changes are foreshadowed. The present administrative units of counties, county boroughs, urban and rural districts, are accepted as adequate. Regionalism is definitely ruled out, and though the Government is prepared to consider the nationalization of certain

* *Local Government in England and Wales during the Period of Reconstruction*, Cmd. 6579.

services if a good case can be made out, they are opposed to any general policy for centralization. Where co-ordination of services between adjacent administrative areas is desirable, the procedure, already established, of joint boards is preferred.

Nor is it contemplated that any major changes in the principles of State subventions of local expenditure are needed. The existing machinery of direct grants to local authorities in aid of specific services, and of the block grant, not earmarked, to supplement the local rates, is regarded as sufficiently flexible to meet any new conditions. In short, the only new proposal contained in the White Paper is that for the establishment of a permanent Local Government Boundary Commission, a small body with executive functions, to deal with all proposals for adjustments of local government areas, whether of the boundaries of counties and county boroughs or of county districts.

It is impossible to avoid the conclusion that the White Paper has been drafted with very little regard for the interests of the rural population. The creation of new county boroughs and the extension of old ones is contemplated, obviously, as likely to provide the major part of the work of the new Boundary Commission, and this can result only in the withdrawal of still more rateable value from the counties and county districts, and in the aggravation of the present difficulty of providing services for the countryman. To take an example, the application for the union of the boroughs of Chatham, Gillingham and Rochester to make one county borough will result, if carried out, in the withdrawal of more than

135,000 people from the administrative county of Kent, or nearly 12 per cent of its total population.

Again, the established procedure of joint boards or committees for co-ordinating services in which two or more areas are involved, cannot be regarded as sufficient to meet all cases. Outstanding examples of difficulty are provided by electricity and water, the former crying out for a national system of distribution, if town and country are to be served alike; the latter calling for a regional system which might cut right across administrative boundaries, because natural sources of supply have no necessary relation to the location of demand.

The White Paper gives no indication of any realization by the Ministry of Health of the disabilities from which the rural population suffers. With certain notable exceptions, there is little difference, to-day, in the levy for rates between town and country. Valuations of property in urban areas are higher, of course, but the levy per £ of rateable value does not differ very greatly either way. Everyone, in town and country alike, contributes on an equal basis to the national exchequer, through income tax. Thus, the time has come, surely, when the glaring disparities between the services provided for town and for country dwellers should be eliminated. Both are equal in their citizenship, and common justice demands that they should be treated equally. With the proviso that one or two public services cannot equitably be administered under the existing administrative units, local government as at present delimited might be made to function satisfactorily in

the future if the responsibility assumed by the State for making grants in aid, and block grants, were interpreted in a new spirit. The White Paper does not exclude the possibility of action to secure this. Everything depends either upon the distribution and the amount of exchequer grants to local authorities, or upon the acceptance of liability by the Central Government for certain services. The provisions of the Education Act, 1944, for example, suggest that the Ministry of Education is now prepared to establish one standard of efficiency throughout the country, by the collaboration of central and local administration in the cost of a universal service. There is little in the past practices of the Ministry of Health, however, and nothing in the White Paper, to indicate an intention to secure the same equality of treatment for town and country in the important matters within its jurisdiction—housing, water supply and sewerage, and the Health services.

The fundamental change called for in the present administration of local government is not so much in the administrative machine as in the principles underlying its finance. The time has come when the maintenance of different charges in different places for the same services should cease, and a scale of national charges should be substituted, based on the average costs of servicing both town and country. Only in this way can the glaring anomalies of the cost of certain services in urban and rural districts, or the lack of them altogether in the latter, be overcome. This is the big question which the White Paper entirely overlooks. Apart from this, only minor adjustments

seem to be called for in the present administration of local government.

Experience suggests, for example, the need for a redistribution of certain functions and responsibilities between the local bodies concerned. It is pretty clear that private building of working-class houses in rural areas is finished. Ever since the dislocation in the building trade, brought about by the war of 1914-18, the responsibility of the State for the housing of the people has steadily increased, as the many Housing Acts passed since that time show, and in rural areas national responsibility is delegated to the District Councils. These bodies are too small to be able to employ the professional assistance needed. The location of housing, its design and construction, not to mention the reconditioning of old houses structurally sound but substandard in accommodation or equipment, are not matters upon which a Building Inspector or District Surveyor should be asked to advise, and to call in the County Architect as consultant is to place too much upon a busy official. Housing should be the function of the County not of the District Councils, and the County Architect's staff should be strengthened to enable him to deal with it. The same considerations apply to water supply, for which the responsibility of District Councils should be transferred to Regional Boards. Electricity is in a different category. At present, distribution is undertaken partly by certain local authorities, the County Boroughs, for example, in which the concentration of population reduces costs to the minimum, and partly by companies trading

for profit, which operate, both in urban and rural areas, at much higher costs to the consumer. Now, wholesale distribution of light and power was made a public utility some years ago; the time seems to be ripe for applying the same principle to retail distribution, and extending it at a flat rate throughout the country.

A few reforms needed to improve the general conduct of local administration would call for legislation. Taking the Parish Councils first, elections by show of hands should no longer be permitted, and the ballot should be made compulsory. In these small societies, the personal element bulks large, and the publicity of the present system often militates against the expression of true public opinion. As to the District Councils, it should be a condition that the Parish Representatives of which they are composed should be members of the Councils of those Parishes, or if not, that they should be co-opted on their election. Finally, steps should be taken to make it possible for working men and women to become members of local administrative bodies by making it an obligation on employers to release them for attendance, and by payment of members for travelling expenses incurred and for loss of time. The White Paper makes it clear that the Government wishes to have an organization which will draw into its service the best types of administrators. Up to the present, the largest class of the rural community has been precluded from effective participation.

CHAPTER V

PROBLEMS OF RURAL LIFE

In the foregoing chapters, emphasis has been laid upon the material conditions of country life and labour, but it must not be forgotten that there are other conditions, moral and spiritual, which, though intangible, are essential to human well-being. Indeed, there is a tendency noticeable, sometimes, to over-stress the importance of these values in the countryman's life to-day. The beauty of the rural scene, and all the uplift which some derive from working in close association with Nature, are argued almost to the point of suggesting that they may be a set-off for low wages, bad housing, lack of public services, inferior education and absence of social life. However, there should be no conflict, nor should the advocacy of higher material standards earn the reproach of a neglect of spiritual values. One is not a set-off for the other: the two are complementary, and together they go to make up the good life.

Is there any evidence for the claims that are made for the special value of the rural environment? Does the countryman display a deeper sense of satisfaction with his work, is he kindlier, is he a better neighbour, does he, in short, exhibit the fruits of the Spirit in a higher degree than the townsman? Surely this comparison of the moral and spiritual values of town and

country life is unnecessary. In every place, alike in the most sordid mining village or great industrial city, as in any beautiful hamlet or pleasant market town, courage, saintliness and beauty of character can be found, as well as cruelty, greed and evil. The Kingdom of God is within you, whether your lot be cast in green pastures, or at the coal-face, or beside the conveyor belt.

There is little evidence of any reaction by the countryman to the beauty of the countryside, or of a realization by him of God in Nature. Boys at the village school do not appear to derive from their environment qualities superior to those of children in the cities. Their fathers are quite unmoved by the beauty around them, whether on the land or in the village—in fact, it is a common experience that people prefer to occupy a speculating builder's bungalow rather than a house typical of the district and mellowed by time, even when reconditioned to bring it up to modern standards of living. It is noteworthy, and probably conclusive, that claims for the special values attaching to the countryman's work do not come from the rural worker. He is not apt, perhaps, to reveal himself either in speech or on paper, but when he has done so, it is to demand better conditions of life rather than to find compensations for bad ones.* Joseph Arch had no illusions on this

* 'What do you think about when you are sitting on your tractor, all day?' a land-girl asked an expert tractor-driver. 'I looks at the bloody earth', he replied, 'and I says, "blast it!"' (A correspondent of the *Economist*, 14 Jan. 1945.)

head, and the agricultural workers' organizations which developed from his mission have found enough which calls for remedy in the low standards, generally, of their members' way of life, to occupy all their energies. The appreciation of the amenities of rural life, of the sensuous pleasure of the rural scene, and the realization of God in Nature, these things may follow when the every-day conditions of life and labour for the man in the village and in the field are such that he can more easily count his blessings. At present, they are realized clearly only by those who have the leisure and the means to enjoy them in some comfort:

'The toad beneath the harrow knows
Exactly where each pinpoint goes:
The butterfly upon the road
Preaches contentment to the toad.'

This insistence on spiritual values is associated, sometimes, with a school of thought, a good deal in evidence at the present time, which makes the welfare of the land its first object rather than the welfare of the human beings upon it. Its philosophy is somewhat obscure and tends to strange paradoxes—that the mechanization of labour processes, and efficiency aims in farming, are wrong, because the farmer's first duty is not so much to achieve a good living for himself and for his men, by producing all that is possible at the lowest possible cost, as to care for the land for its own sake, whatever that may mean and involve; that the use of artificial manures is wrong because 'healthy' crops can only be produced from 'healthy'

soil with the aid of 'natural' manures. There is often a deep spiritual satisfaction to be found in working with Nature, which is well known to many who have dug an allotment or who have watched over the hatching of a brood of chicks, or helped in the harvest field. As experiences for the uninitiated, such creative work can induce a state almost of exaltation, but it may be doubted whether the prophets of the new pantheism could maintain it if they spent day after day and week after week in mucking out cowsheds, spreading dung, milking night and morning, in return for £3. 10s. a week and an ill-equipped cottage.

'According to one line of thought on this matter, it is desirable to maintain rural population because of the effects on national character of the rural manner of life. The conservative instincts, and even the slowness of thinking, which are supposed to belong to the typical inhabitant of country districts, are considered to be a good balance, as compared with the less stable instincts of the town dwellers; and, further, there is a certain appreciation of the picturesqueness of rural life and character. Because this is a matter of direct appreciation, it is not easy to give definiteness to these considerations; but many people attach great importance to them. Now, it is necessary to avoid anything in the nature of a supercilious or even selfish patronage of rural life. For the appreciation of rural life which matters is not that of persons usually resident in towns, who are able to spend convenient periods in the country in the months when the country is at its best. The appreciation which matters is that of persons who have to spend their lives, summer and winter, in scattered villages, cottages and farms. And in all countries, large numbers of

these persons express that appreciation by the rural exodus. How ideal rural life is, is a matter of opinion, on which they have had something to say.*

It cannot seriously be argued that there is any spiritual or moral quality manifest either in the countryman or in the townsman in which the other is deficient. There is ample evidence, however, that the great mass of industrial workers have opportunities for reaching high standards better than those vouchsafed to many rural workers. The spiritual and social life centred in church and chapel flows in the towns with a strength unknown in the great majority of country places. This is not to say that the townsman is more prone to religious observance than the countryman. The vitality of church and chapel life in the towns, so conspicuously absent in the country, arises from the concentration of population. The great majority of townsfolk are just as apathetic towards religious observance as are country folk, but, where population is concentrated, the small percentage of church and chapel goers is enough to make real congregations, whereas the same percentage in a village of a few hundred people is a mere handful. Inside the village church, there is no one, probably, to train a choir, nor voices sufficient to make one, while the congregational singing and responses serve only to emphasize the emptiness of the building. Outside the church, many of the parochial activities of every kind associated with it, which flourish in

* Professor D. H. Macgregor in the *Report of the Agricultural Tribunal of Investigation*, Cmd. 2145, 1924, p. 195.

every town, are almost unknown. There is a lack of the necessary leadership in the little places, and there are often not enough people, young or old, to be led.

The same applies to those cultural and social activities which are run independently of the religious organizations. Adult education, which has made great strides in the past generation, is restricted, by lack of numbers sufficient to make classes, largely to urban areas, and the paucity of population is a depressing factor in rural areas in almost every other opportunity for mental stimulus—public libraries, concerts, theatres and cinemas. While it is not suggested that the townsman is more avid than the countryman for tutorial classes, for serious literature, music and so forth, the opportunity is his and he need never suffer from the intellectual or spiritual starvation which must afflict, from time to time, certain of the country dwellers.

It has been suggested, and not a few people believe, that a good deal could be done to instil a greater contentment in the rural worker through a revival of craftsmanship, both in rural industries and on the farm. There are reasons for the passing of rural industries of all kinds, under the competition of modern industrial organization. But this does not explain the decay of artistry in farm work, for although some of the farmers' complaints about the quality of their labour may be exaggerated, there is plenty of evidence that the agricultural worker to-day, with his weekly wage of £3. 10s., is not the artist that his grandfather was, with his 10s. or 12s. and nothing

on wet days. There is substance in the complaint that good thatchers are scarce, and not every farm can produce a good rick builder. The standard of hedging has declined, and it would be difficult, to-day, to find the skilled land drainers which every estate of any size maintained two generations ago. These, perhaps, were specialist jobs, but in the ordinary work of the farm it is an undoubted fact that there is not the fine finish by which once it was characterized. There are corners in the fields which the ploughman cannot reach, and these at one time were forked up by hand. The stack was not finished when it had been put up and thatched, for then a man would brush its sides with a scythe-blade, trim the eaves with shears, and he would adorn the ridge with some fancy device in straw. It was common practice, too, on any large farm, for a few men to spend Saturday afternoon making the rickyard and the surroundings of the homestead clean and tidy for Sunday. And who, to-day, would expect to see the farm horses, where such still remain, with their tails and manes plaited with straw and ribbons, on the days on which they are to deliver produce in the market town? Neglect of some of these things does not indicate, necessarily, a falling off in production from the land, but they suggest a slackening in the artificer's pride in his work, which is to be regretted.

This decline in standards of performance is not easy to explain. It represents, probably, conformity by the workman to the general lowering of standards, alike by landlords and farmers, of the maintenance of

the equipment of farming. The decline in the prosperity of these two classes, with the passing of the Golden Age of British farming, led to a retrenchment of expenditure—by the one on the repair and replacement of farm buildings, and by the other, on anything on the land not likely to give him an immediate return. Paint and tar brushes were spared, wood-work became, first, bare, and next, it began to rot. Slates and tiles blown off were not promptly replaced and roof timbers were exposed to the weather. Gates began to sag, then to drag, and soon to give way. And if the farmer, following the lead of his landlord, were content, for his part, to see his hedges jagged and broken by a boy with a long billhook, rather than to have them cut and laid by a craftsman, why that was so much gained in times when money in farming was more easily saved than made. Small wonder if the workman, discouraged and even prevented from displaying his skill, began to conform to lower standards, which became, in course of time, the normal for the next generation. It may be suggested, too, that the substitution of factory products in the shops of the villages and market towns for the products of home industries and of village tradesmen, has had a depressing effect, also, on rural craftsmanship. A village mother was proud to send her daughter into service with 'three of everything', all cut out, sewn and embroidered by herself; * to-day, she would buy the necessary garments, ready made,

* See Flora Thompson, *Candleford Green*, p. 8. Oxford University Press. 1943.

at the nearest multiple store. In every part of the house, too, cheap factory goods have displaced the products of local handwork. There can be no return, of course, to an organization of industry which reduces the productivity of labour; most of the old village industries are dead and must be allowed to rest. There is a limit, too, to the extent to which labour can be employed merely on the embellishment or the embroidery of the task, but there remains the problem of how to retain the interest of the worker in doing a good job, if it be no longer possible to allow him to add either the fine finish or the frills.

It should be noted that these displays of dexterity and art were associated with the larger farms, and that they were given by hired men. On the smaller holdings of the working farmers, there was little time for adornments. Since the passing of the days of family self-sufficiency as the motive of farming, and its replacement by systems of production for the market, the small farmer has always been at a disadvantage, except during periods of economic crisis on the land. When times are bad, the family-farmer has an economic stability all his own, and greater than that of the employer of labour in agriculture or probably in any other industry. Rent is almost his only outgoing, and the smaller the farm, the higher is the ratio of his production of food for home consumption. Thus, while the marketable surplus will bring in less and less during times of slump, until the capitalist farmer's balance moves over to

the wrong side of his account, the smallholder, engaged mainly in food production for his family and with the help of their unpaid labour, can maintain his position. In Britain, the larger farms are manifest, speaking broadly, in the eastern half of the country and the smaller ones in the western half, and when markets have been adverse there has been a steady migration of men on the land from west to east, which was speeded up from time to time when the depression was acute, as the family-farmers came in to take over larger holdings from capitalist farmers unable to carry on until times improved.*

Some parts of Britain are characteristically peasant-farmed and are likely to remain so. At the same time, their economic strength cannot be used as an argument for furthering a national smallholdings policy as the proper agrarian-social policy for the State. Economic strength has nothing necessarily to do with economic efficiency, and it has been shown in an earlier chapter how handicapped the smaller farmers are in the application of labour-saving machinery (see p. 22). The traditional peasant must be recognized, and his efficiency can be raised considerably by co-operative organization for the purchase of requisites and for the sale of produce. War-time arrangements for carrying out certain tillage opera-

* In some parts the indigenous farming class has been largely displaced by these immigrants. A district of Essex, for example, was repopulated from the West of Scotland, and many farmers in the south midlands are only one generation removed from Welsh, Devon and Somerset forbears. (See E. Lorrain-Smith, *Go East for a Farm*. Clarendon Press. 1932.)

tions for him by contract labour, too, have lightened his toil, and they might be carried over into peacetime. There is all the difference in the world, however, between the old communities of peasant farmers and the recent artificial settlements of men in smallholdings. The attempts to revert to an organization of food production on little farms, tenanted by men of no education, unable to increase the output of their hands by the use of mechanical equipment beyond the scope of their holdings, and likely to be deprived, in the near future, by Mr Butler's Education Act, of much of the unpaid family labour upon which their relative success depends, can be regarded only as reactionary and mistaken.

Up to the present time, land settlement has been striving to supply two needs. In its oldest form—the smallholdings created by the County Councils under the Small Holdings Act, 1906, and subsequent Acts—it was intended to provide an economic ladder for the farm worker, and as such it has failed. There is no general history of progress to larger farms amongst the tenants, and this activity in the subdivision of land, extending over forty years, has not sufficed to maintain the total number of small farms in the country, in the face of the opposite tendency towards absorption and amalgamation dictated by economic pressure. More recently, attempts have been made to use land settlement as a remedy for industrial unemployment, under voluntary organizations aided both by public and by charitable funds. Fifteen years' experience has shown that it offers no solution.

Many of the industrial workers transplanted could not settle happily in the rural environment; others were always on the look-out for chances to return to their own callings.

The dissatisfaction of country men and women, and particularly of the younger of them, with their conditions and opportunities, a dissatisfaction which expresses itself in taking every opportunity to leave the land, is something to be remedied rather than to be deprecated. It is a clear indication that country life, to-day, will not bear comparison with urban life in the estimate of those most concerned, and this position should be faced squarely. Much good work has been done, and more is foreshadowed, for the improvement of conditions, and the value of organizations such as the Women's Institutes, Young Farmers' Clubs, Village Produce Associations, Pig Clubs, and the much older Flower Shows, in maintaining corporate life is very real. In the smaller villages, however, they are difficult to organize, and interest is often quickly lost through lack of leadership and numbers. By themselves, they cannot save the countryside. If any real revival of rural life is to be achieved, it must be recognized that in a state so highly industrialized as Britain, hundreds of the village communities, to-day, are anachronisms. They call for a new conception of rural life, industrial, social and administrative, as the only alternative to a continuous draining off of their best elements, and the persistence of agriculture as a parasitic industry. It is becoming fashionable to deride planning and

to condemn control, but the national economy has reached a pitch of complexity under which it seems impossible to leave the agricultural industry entirely to the self-determination of farmers and the free play of economic forces. Self-determination can only mean the persistence of traditional systems of land tenure and farm practice which are calling out for State aid; while under the free play of economic forces the land has had nothing to offer the largest part of the rural community, the workers.

What seems to be wanted in every phase of rural life and labour is a larger conception of every kind of organization, a final break with the idea, which is very real if often subconscious, that the little village community is a good thing in itself, socially and aesthetically.

Industrially, the little farms of 50-250 acres are inefficient units. They have nothing to offer to the manager with education and enterprise, nothing for the worker of skill and capacity. Their equipment is generally deficient and out-of-date. With the reservation that in small parts of Britain there is still a strong tradition of peasant farming, the best hope for the agricultural industry lies in a new inclosure movement which would gradually reassemble the land in larger units, giving scope to management and opportunities to labour. How this agrarian revolution should be brought about does not matter. It could come from within the industry, at the instance of the landowners and farmers, as did the old inclosure movement, or it could be carried through by the

State, as many of the land reforms in European countries have come. But in one way or the other, there seems to be no alternative to it, if British agriculture is to continue as one of the major industries of the country, contributing fully to its needs, material and social, by its production and by the opportunities afforded for employment.

Socially, the application of the same remedy is called for. Only by the enlargement and by the reconstitution of the village community can its people have the fuller social life which they need. Only larger societies can group themselves effectively, whether for improvement and benefit or for recreation and entertainment. At the same time, single-industry communities are socially undesirable, and many rural districts are calling out for an infusion of other activities to enrich their social life and to supply alternative economic opportunity. A growth such as this could be planned and executed, probably, only by the State. Recent examples of the uncontrolled decentralization of industry and of the accommodation of its workers in adjacent village communities are, for the most part, examples of 'how not to do it'. Properly planned and controlled, however, the fusion of town and country elements into one community for social purposes should supply nearly everything that is lacking in village life to-day.

Finally, there is the administrative problem in rural areas. At present, the policy of segregation of town and country in administrative districts, which creates, on the one hand, areas of concentrated population

where public services of all kinds are cheaply and easily provided, and on the other hand, areas sparsely populated, where the cost of such services is always high relatively, and often prohibitive, is unjust to the latter in these days, when citizens in town and country all contribute alike to the upkeep of the State according to their means. The system of local administration is admirable in the use that it makes of delegated authority and knowledge of local conditions. It fails in its methods of finance, which favour the populous districts at the expense of the rural communities. The whole scheme of local government is ripe for an overhaul, for the removal of the present glaring anomalies between town and country by reforms which would nationalize some services and regionalize others, while delegating administration on every possible occasion to locally elected bodies.

In all public administration, as also in voluntary associations of many kinds, there is a general need for a stronger infusion of the younger people. It is commonly alleged that the Bench, for example, consists of elderly people out of touch with youth and its outlook, and the average age of most local government bodies must be nearer seventy than forty. Few men and women seem to have the means or the leisure necessary, under the present system, to undertake public administration until they are well up in middle age. It is noticeable, too, how the voluntary social organizations, started and run in their earlier days by younger people zealous for social service, tend to lose their fire as these same people get older and do not.

make way for new blood. Some of them, too, begun as voluntary associations and demonstrating their worth, have been taken over in whole or in part by public administrative bodies, and the efficiency of the public official may or may not be a good substitute for the enthusiasm of the voluntary worker. The problem of young blood in public life of all kinds is a national one, but it is particularly urgent in country places, where young people are relatively fewer, and where the intimate character of small communities makes it more difficult for youth to assert itself. Amongst youth organizations, the Young Farmers' Clubs, at all events, have realized this and are training their members to take an interest in public administration and social service. If this were associated with a self-denying ordinance on the part of the older people, it should have a revivifying influence on public life in the country.

These considerations of the problems of the countryside have been limited, deliberately, to those which affect the life and living of the countryman. It is his social and economic status which has been reviewed, and the solution of the problems disclosed has turned on how to improve his condition and his opportunities. However, the countryside presents quite another set of problems when it is regarded from the standpoint of the townsman, for in this over-urbanized country, the rural scene is called upon to satisfy a natural instinct in him, which cannot be sublimated all the time, still less contented, by model dwellings

and all the social services, nor even by cinemas, public recreation grounds and adult education. For the elderly, satisfaction may be found in a charabanc ride, and the seaside appeals alike to the old and the young.

One of the more recent developments in the social life of young adults of both sexes in the towns, however, is that of rambling and cycling clubs. Through them, and in association with the Youth Hostels and Holiday Camps, there seems to be a demand, likely to grow rapidly after the war, for better access to the countryside for exercise and recreation. For recreation at the week-end in the country immediately around the town, this is largely a question of the preservation of footpaths. There has been wholesale destruction and diversion of them, during the war, for national needs. Where closing of rights-of-way has followed the construction of aerodromes, munition factories and other war-time activities, they may be difficult to recover. The greatest number, however, are those which have been ploughed up in the food production campaign, and these, too, may well be lost in many places unless deliberate steps are taken for their restoration. It cannot be expected that landowners and farmers will encourage their reopening, and ramblers' societies might well occupy themselves in the next few years in re-tracing these lost easements.

For the townsman on holiday, nothing seems needed so much as the scheduling of certain districts, particularly mountain and heath land, as National Parks or public open spaces. Most people are aware of the proposals for creating such areas in the Lake

District, in Snowdonia, in the New Forest, Exmoor, Dartmoor and so on. There is also the further question, in this connexion, of freer public access to many parts of the country besides those suggested for National Parks, such as the foreshore all round the coast, the downlands and many other open stretches, which, though devoted as a rule to some sort of extensive agriculture, would suffer little or nothing if the public were admitted more freely to them.

Restrictions tend to create resentment in the minds of holiday makers, and the time has come for the adoption of a more generous attitude. Education and public opinion have made such advances in recent years that *bona-fide* grounds for complaint against the townsman for abuse of the countryside should become progressively fewer. Natural beauty is a national heritage, and while it should be the privilege of all to enjoy it, so also must it be the responsibility of all to maintain it.

Another problem of the countryside which might be mentioned is the provision of Nature Reserves, where the natural flora and fauna of Britain can be preserved from destruction or exploitation, to be available for observation and for scientific study. Nature Reserves, however, like the National Parks, are particular problems, which call for consideration apart from the more general issues arising in the countryside.*

* See John Dower, *National Parks in England and Wales*. Cmd. 6628. H.M.S.O., 1945; also A. G. Tansley, *Our Heritage of Wild Nature*. Cambridge University Press. 1945.

Let us try to reconstruct the scene, then, which might greet the eyes of another Rip Van Winkle, who had fallen asleep, say, in 1940, and awakened a generation later, after the nation, freed from its preoccupation with war, had set itself to solve some of the problems, industrial and social, of the countryside.

The landscape, as it first greeted him, would show notable changes. While the appeal of the rural scene, always fresh to the country lover, affected him as strongly as ever, there was now a spaciousness and order about it which was new. The many awkward little fields, the pastures too often full of thistles and sometimes of thorns, the overgrown hedgerows and choked ditches, all were gone. The trim hedges enclosed larger fields, more of them were in crops of various kinds, and where grass appeared, it had the strength and vigour associated more with clover mixtures than with aforetime permanent pastures and meadows. There were no horses to be seen; all the field work in progress was being carried out by the agricultural tractors, which he remembered as just coming into general use. Some of the implements were familiar, enlarged to give full scope to the power of the tractors, but others were quite new to him. Everywhere there was the suggestion of technical changes, all of which seemed to promote a greater activity on the land.

As he approached a homestead, he found himself walking along a good concrete roadway, and he soon discovered that all the approaches to the buildings, and the roads and paths about them, were of the

same material. The farm manager and his men, the implements and livestock, all could move about the place free from the muck and mire which were the universal accompaniments of farm work as he remembered it. But there were far greater changes than these. Gone were the dilapidated old barns (all the corn was now cut and threshed in one operation in the harvest field); gone, the dark and dirty cowsheds (the cows were now milked in the fields by travelling milking machines, a system which made for healthier cows and cleaner milk and which saved so much labour that a man and boy could manage between 50 and 100 cows); gone, the ranges of pig hovels, constructed so that nothing larger than a pig could enter them (pigs were now kept in houses designed for healthy living conditions, and for economy of labour in feeding and attention such that one man could feed several hundred pigs); gone, the open sheds and dirty corners in which valuable implements and machines rusted and deteriorated, or served, at best, as poultry perches (there was ample shedding on concrete floors for all the farm equipment). In short, the homestead impressed him, just as the fields had done, with its air of order and efficiency, and its suggestion of a live and progressive enterprise which was so remote from most of the farming which he remembered.

He wondered at the number of young men he saw about the place, and learned from the manager that this reconstructed homestead was the headquarters of a large farming enterprise, built up from an amalgamation of several smaller farms. Only through

the larger unit had it been found possible, he said, to give full scope to highly qualified management, to modern machinery and to skilled workers. By these means English agriculture had been enabled to hold its place in the world food market with its products, and in the home labour market with its opportunities.

The isolated cottages in the fields, remote from neighbours, public services and the amenities of village life, seemed to have disappeared. The homestead itself was placed centrally for convenience of management, but it was sited, also, on a good road. Nearly all the men, it seemed, lived in houses in the villages, and came to their work on motor bicycles. The farming, he found, was carried on much more intensively than in the days as he remembered it, and there were large acreages of potatoes and green crops. They caused a considerable demand for seasonal labour, and Rip Van Winkle learned that lorries went daily from the farm at these times to the surrounding villages as transport for such workers.

His conversation with the manager had taken place in an office, with all the paraphernalia of modern business organization. He noticed, too, that the building equipment included what appeared to be a mechanic's workshop for the repair of farm machinery.

It was with a feeling of slight bewilderment that he betook himself, next, to the village of his youth. As he approached, it was obvious that the place had grown, but not beyond recognition. New houses came out to meet him, pleasant houses, larger than those which he had known, each with a good garden

and plenty of space about it. Some were on the roadside, while others lay back from it, and there was a coherence and economy about the lay-out, as far removed as it could be from the exploitation of roadside frontages of the old days. As he walked on, the new houses merged almost imperceptibly into the old village without incongruity, new and old being drawn together even more closely by the insertion, here and there, of pairs of new ones on vacant sites in the village itself. Most of the new houses were occupied, it seemed, by workers in a factory which had been moved out of Birmingham and set up on a site about five miles away.

Reaching the green, the old familiar scene came back to him, for here the changes were fewer. The church, with its fine Norman tower, still dominated the scene, but the ugly Victorian vicarage-house was transformed. It had been too large for modern requirements and for the parson's stipend, but now it was larger still, and Rip Van Winkle learnt that it had become the Community Centre—the focus of all the social activity of the village. The great, untidy garden was now laid out with tennis courts and bowling greens for young and old. The new wing added to the house was the Village Hall, with a stage for plays and concerts. The rest of the house served for the Health Clinic, the County Library, clubrooms, adult education classrooms, a canteen and restaurant, dormitories for a Youth Hostel and so on. A smaller, labour-saving vicarage-house, erected on glebe land near the churchyard, now accommodated the vicar.

The school in which Van Winkle had been educated, and the school-house, had gone, and in their place was a new and larger building. Instead of the one classroom in which all standards had been taught, there were now several, and instead of the Gothic windows of his childhood, too small for their purpose and too high to see out of, it was obvious that the admission of light and air was an important part of the design.

Otherwise, the surroundings of the green had changed little, except that the growth of the community had called for further trading facilities. A branch of the local Co-operative Society occupied the site of what had been the wheelwright's shop and yard. There was a new and larger general shop, and a butcher's business where none had been before, but the same little Post Office still served, and it still sold sweets, cigarettes and picture postcards. On the far side of the green there had been the same sort of housing development as that which he had seen on his approach, but there was no suggestion about the place of a divided community, of an old village and a new housing estate. On the contrary, Rip Van Winkle had an impression of a virile, well-knit society, as though there had been a blood transfusion into the old body corporate, which had caused it to expand and to develop, both physically and mentally. There was a vigour and activity about the place which it had never suggested as he remembered it, and he found it good.

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